

Free of Darkness, Free of Light

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Free of Darkness, Free of Light

by [hannigraMadancy](#)

Summary

After Will discovers Hannibal's true identity, the latter is forced to keep his paramour captive while trying to persuade him to remain loyal.

Notes

This will be a very slow-burning novella/short novel-length work. I've already written a ton of it but will be posting in sections. :)

(Not beta'd)

Gutter Ball

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 Summary:

The Chesapeake Ripper strikes again. Will is less than thrilled.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal carefully plunged his hands into the gaping abdominal cavity before him. With scalpel in one gloved hand, he used the other to maneuver the organs in front of him. A clean cut was essential. A mutilated liver could be masked simply enough with the appropriate recipe, but a haphazardly removed organ would ruin the aesthetic of his artwork.

With his training as a former surgeon, he had never experienced trouble when it came to harvesting ingredients for his meals. And he wasn't about to now either. With steady hands, Hannibal held the liver in one hand and sliced the hepatic portal vein with the scalpel. Once he finished separating the rest of the connections, he laid the scalpel down beside the man and removed the organ with both hands. The cuts were made close to the organ, expertly severing with minimal damage.

Hannibal smiled.

As he carefully tucked the organ away in the cooler he had brought along, his mind raced through possible recipes. No matter what he decided, it would be created with the utmost care and attention to detail. For now, he needed to finish his masterpiece.

Edward Pinter was the name of the man sprawled out in the gutter on lane number one in the Alley Cat bowling establishment. Hannibal knew because he had requested a business card from the man upon witnessing his less-than-courteous behavior at a restaurant in downtown Baltimore three nights earlier.

Will had made dinner reservations for the two of them at *Bella di Luccio*, a five star restaurant in the city, well known for its gourmet dishes and experienced *sommeliers*. Will had done extensive research, looking into numerous restaurants around Baltimore, in an attempt to find one that would please Hannibal's senses. The younger man had seemed overly excited at the prospect of allowing Hannibal to spend a relaxing night away from the kitchen. Hannibal thought it too ineffably impolite to extinguish Will's excitement by informing him that the thought of someone else preparing his meals made his skin crawl. Hannibal had known from the beginning that he would not, in fact, enjoy his night away from the kitchen, but he had resigned himself to tolerate it. The empath had missed his mark on that one.

Or, perhaps, Hannibal thought, the effect had been intended.

Will was a curious creature, just like himself. Hannibal would not have been surprised if Will had planned the entire night, knowing what Hannibal's thoughts would be, just to see if he could rattle him.

The notion should have annoyed Hannibal, but instead, it made him smile.

No matter the intention, the night had not been a lost one. The owner of the restaurant had made an appearance only to later be overheard, through the open doorway to the kitchen, yelling at a member of the wait staff about his lack of class and sophistication. When the same owner emerged into the dining room to greet patrons, Hannibal took it upon himself to request a business card for future reference. The man flashed bright white teeth as he handed the card to Hannibal, undoubtedly pleased with himself for what he must have assumed was a very satisfied patron. Hannibal had tucked the card into the inner pocket of his jacket, his mind wandering to recipe ideas that would inevitably satisfy his palate much greater than the supposed gourmet dish he had just consumed.

Three nights later, Hannibal was indeed satisfied. With the liver packed away, he went to work finishing his piece. He fetched a bowling ball from the rack and walked atop the divider between the lanes, returning to kneel beside the body. He worked the ball into the man's abdominal cavity, broke both of his legs at the knees, and folded his body until his ankles rested on his shoulders. He retrieved a length of twine he had brought and secured the man's feet in place. Finished with the piece, he stood and stared down at the final product. Satisfied that each aspect was perfectly in place, he retrieved the scalpel and the cooler and left the bowling alley.

Will parked his car near the Alley Cat bowling alley located twenty minutes outside of Baltimore. Jack had called him in the early afternoon after a body had been discovered by the owner. The bowling alley was supposed to be closed all day, but the owner had swung by to collect something forgotten from the previous evening.

The outside of the building was already surrounded by a crowd of people – police officers, agents, news reporters. Will flashed his credentials to a stationary officer and then ducked under the crime scene tape the man held up for him. Will had barely stepped inside the police cordon before Jack was on him.

“Body's inside,” he said.

Will offered a nod of acknowledgement. He assumed as much.

“The body looks staged but the place is pretty clean. No prints or DNA of any kind so far.” He paused and then added, “At least not from the killer.”

Another officer stood at the door to the bowling alley. When he saw the two of them approach, he pulled it open, holding it until Will and Jack were inside.

“This way,” Jack said, turning to his left. Will followed.

The crowd was smaller inside but there were more people around than Will preferred. They wove their way through the agents and forensics team until they had a clear view of the parallel lanes.

But there was only one of interest.

Will nudged his glasses closer to his face, his attention homing in on the spectacle on the first lane.

There was an agent standing on the divider between the first and second lanes. She had a camera in hand, the flash going off every few seconds. Will stared at what she was shooting.

There was a body in the gutter, naked with both legs folded back on itself and bound in place.

A human bowling ball.

“You think it’s the Ripper?” Jack said from over Will’s shoulder.

That had become Jack Crawford’s catch phrase of late. At least it had in Will’s mind. Every crime scene they came across, that was always his first question to Will.

A human bowling ball. The symbolism was clear. The grotesque ostentation was familiar. But Will would need a closer look in order to answer Jack’s question to satisfaction.

As though on cue, Jack barked, “Clear the room.”

Will stood in place at the end of lane number one, agents moving around him. The crowd cleared and when the sound died down, Will closed his eyes.

Light moved behind his eyelids like a glowing pendulum. The scene in front of him vanished and he found himself just outside the bowling alley. It was nighttime and the parking lot was vacant. There were no cars, no law enforcement officers, no news teams, no crime scene tape. It was just Will and the man about to become a human bowling ball.

Will’s arms were wrapped around the man. He wasn’t large but he was heavy with unconsciousness. The door to the building was propped open with a rock, something he must have done before hauling the man over. He dragged him inside, immediately taking his body to his lane of choice. He laid the man’s body down in the gutter, face up. The man’s chest rose and fell ever so slightly.

“I kept you alive because I wanted you to see where you would die.”

The man stirred, his eyelids fluttering open. He looked up at Will, his eyes wide and fearful as he searched Will’s face.

I know you.

As soon as the thought came, it was gone. Will knelt down on the lane divider as the man opened his mouth. Before he could let out a scream, Will nicked the side of the man’s neck

with a scalpel. The wound was small but deadly. The blood that surged forth did not spray wildly but instead squirted out steadily, draining into the gutter beneath the man's body.

"Completely severing your carotid would end your life too soon. I want you to die, but not quickly."

Will watched the man's widened eyes shift from panic to resignation and then finally to lifelessness. Will didn't bother to close them as he went to work.

"I open you up to take what I want from you." The man was naked now. Will carved open his belly with a scalpel. "It isn't personal."

Then the scalpel disappeared from Will's hand and instead he held a bowling ball. He worked it into the man's gaping abdomen. "You belong here." Then he broke bones to maneuver the rest of the body into place. "You deserve to be indecently exposed in the gutter." He bound the snapped legs with twine to keep them secured. "This is your rightful place."

Will stood, stepping backwards to take in the view. His image – his artwork – was complete.

"This is my design."

Will closed his eyes again, but when the images continued to flood behind his eyelids, he opened them.

The lifeless and contorted body was still before him as he stood on the lane divider. He wasn't entirely sure he had come out of his trance. Will looked over his shoulder to see Jack lurking near the closed door of the exit. He let out a breath and walked back to the end of the lane. Jack had already started to approach.

"Is it the Ripper?" Jack asked again.

"It could be."

"Tell me about this killer, Will."

Will glanced back at the body that looked almost comical lying in the gutter. If it hadn't been so gruesome, so sadistic, the image may have been amusing. But as it were, the sight instead churned his stomach. He looked away, meeting Jack's eyes.

Safer.

"This killer is mocking him."

"How so?" Jack stared at him.

Will averted his eyes, finding a spot on the wall to stare at instead.

Safest.

“He left him in the gutter. It’s where he belongs.” Will paused. “At least, that’s what the killer believes.”

“Did he know his killer?”

Will contorted his features. “No. He may have met him. Most likely offended him in some way. I think the killer knew more about this man than the other way around.”

“Why the gutter?”

“He was trash. Sludge. Something to be discarded without a second thought. Unworthy of anything better.”

“Does the killer have medical knowledge?”

Jack was relentless. Will didn’t bother containing his sigh.

“His carotid was cut with precision. Just enough to kill him without bleeding him out too quickly.” Will glanced at the human bowling ball wrapped around the actual bowling ball. “But it is difficult to say for sure without—”

“Without what?” Jack prodded.

“Without unfolding the body,” Will said slowly. The words left an acrid taste in his mouth. “But there’s something familiar,” he added, staring at the spot on the wall again.

“Familiar, how? Familiar like you’ve seen this work before?”

“Familiar, like...” Will started. He paused to look at the lifeless man again. “Like I recognize him from somewhere.”

Despite not looking directly at Jack, Will saw the man’s eyebrows skyrocket.

“You know this man?” Jack asked, inclining his head closer.

Will resisted the urge to take a step back. “I don’t know him. It is a vague familiarity I can’t quite nail down.”

“And you think the killer knew him too?”

“I think he knew *of* the man, yes. Knew what kind of person he was. He could see him.” Will took his glasses off and absently rubbed the hem of his shirt over a lens. “He didn’t like what he saw.”

Jack asked a few more questions about what Will had seen when he imagined himself as the killer. When Will started to feel as though he were repeating himself, he let out a hefty sigh.

“Am I irritating you, Will?” Jack said, his words clipped. Will wasn’t the only one who sounded annoyed.

“No,” he lied. “But, right now, I cannot give you any more than I already have.” Will glanced at Jack.

The larger man stared at him, jaw clenched and unblinking. “Okay.”

Will stayed put until he noticed Jack’s focus wander away from Will. Then, Will put his glasses back on and walked away. He exited the bowling alley, the cold rush of late Autumn air cooling his cheeks. He traipsed across the busy parking lot, ducking under the crime scene tape again. He made it to his car and slid behind the wheel, feeling safe – safer, at least – in the relative privacy. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

Hannibal walked to the wardrobe against the wall and pulled open the heavy wooden doors. It was evening and his appointments were finished for the day. He retrieved his thigh length black overcoat coat and slipped it on over his suit. He heard a *click* and knew it was his office door being opened. His last patient of the day had already left and he was not expecting anyone else. But it was inconsiderate to enter without being invited, and especially so without even knocking. Hannibal refrained from letting out a sigh.

Hannibal closed the doors to the wardrobe and looked towards the office entry. Someone had indeed entered the office. Hannibal let the frown take over his features.

“Will?”

Will didn’t respond. He stood on the far side of the room, facing out one of the two floor-to-ceiling windows adorned with heavy gray and red drapes.

Hannibal took his time crossing the room. He stopped a few feet behind Will, unsure of the current state of mind of his unofficial patient. Hannibal spoke the younger man’s name again, but this time, Will responded.

He turned and looked over his shoulder at Hannibal. He blinked rapidly and then his focus flitted around the room, never landing on a single subject for more than a moment.

“How did I get here?” Will asked. His voice was thick and raspy.

Hannibal took a step forward and let his gaze fall to Will’s hand clenched at his side. Hannibal reached down and gently took his hand. He lifted it and turned it over, coaxing the younger man to open his hand. When he did, Hannibal saw a set of keys in his palm.

“It may be safe to assume you drove.”

Will looked down at his hand for the first time, his face contorting as he stared at the keys he held, as though the jagged metal was foreign and incomprehensible to him.

“I was at a crime scene.”

Hannibal let Will’s hand go. “Tell me about the crime scene, Will.”

Will stuffed the keys into the pocket of his jeans. Then, he exhaled heavily and closed his eyes. He shook his head back and forth. Hannibal waited. Will removed his glasses and tucked them away in a jacket pocket. When he opened his eyes again, he was staring past Hannibal, but his gaze didn't seem to be focused on anything in particular.

"It was a human bowling ball," Will said, his voice quiet and flat.

"Jack had you analyze it." It wasn't a question.

"Yes," Will whispered. He began to pace the floor.

"Then what happened, Will?"

He brought both arms up, gesturing awkwardly as he spoke. "Then, I—I left. I got in my car to leave, anyway."

"You don't remember leaving?"

"No."

"You lost time again."

Will kept walking and brought both hands up, scrubbing his palms over his face. "Maybe I should get another opinion," he said quietly.

Hannibal let out a gentle, calculated sigh. "You have already had a second opinion."

"I am not crazy."

"No. But your mind is unstable, Will. It cannot handle the things Jack is forcing you to absorb."

"I can handle it," Will said, his words clipped with annoyance.

"Is this you handling it now?"

"No. I just got overwhelmed."

"You continue to get overwhelmed, yet you do nothing to stop that."

"I can't just stop. People are dying."

"This is not good for you, Will."

"I need another opinion," Will repeated.

"Has my opinion become insufficient to you?"

"No." Will shook his head without looking up. "I mean from a neurologist. I should get another opinion."

“Will, you have had multiple tests from a neurologist.” Hannibal took a step towards the path of the pacing man. “What you need is a break.”

Will continued pacing but met Hannibal’s gaze for a split second. Hannibal stepped into his path, causing the smaller man to stop abruptly in his tracks.

Hannibal reached out and placed his palm to Will’s cheek. He lowered his voice and said, “Before you end up breaking.”

Will held Hannibal’s gaze for the first time since entering the office. His eyes were narrowed and glassy. His jaw clenched tightly. Hannibal brushed his thumb over Will’s scratchy stubble and the younger man’s facial muscles relaxed. Will closed his eyes and ever so slightly leaned into Hannibal’s caress.

“We should cancel dinner tonight,” Hannibal said. “I will call Alana.”

Will’s eyes flew open and he shook his head. “No. Why would you do that?”

Hannibal lowered his hand. “I do not want to overstimulate you.”

“I could use the distraction.”

Hannibal stared at Will without saying a word.

“Alana is not the problem.” Will exhaled heavily and ran a hand through his dark, messy curls. “Besides, it would be rude to cancel so late.” Will glanced up through his lashes at Hannibal.

The corners of Hannibal’s mouth twitched. Will’s astuteness rarely surprised him anymore, but it did still often amuse him.

“Well, we wouldn’t want that,” Hannibal said.

“No,” Will agreed. “We wouldn’t.” The smaller man took a step forward, his eyes downcast again. He reached out and took Hannibal’s hand in his own. He held it gently, making no move to increase their contact further.

Hannibal placed a finger beneath Will’s chin and lifted. Will’s head rose easily and then Hannibal leaned in close. He feathered his lips against the younger man’s, the gentle touch leaving a tickling sensation on his own lips. Will let the feeling linger only a moment before pressing his mouth against Hannibal’s in a chaste kiss.

The kiss lasted only a few seconds before Will broke contact. “Can we go home?” he whispered.

Will still held his hand, and Hannibal used his other to brush a lock of hair away from Will’s forehead. “Yes, of course.”

Chapter End Notes

The scene in Hannibal's office is intentionally familiar (the similar scene from Trou Normand is one of my faves). :)

An Unsavory Truth

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 Summary:

Will and Hannibal enjoy normal relationship time together until Will comes to a horrifying realization. Dinner and pillow talk and terrifying epiphanies, oh my!

Hannibal stood at the kitchen counter, preparing the evening's dinner. He thought about Will. He imagined his reaction upon seeing the gutter ball Hannibal had left for the FBI. He hadn't expected the man's reaction to be good, but the impromptu visit to Hannibal's office told him Will was only getting worse.

Hannibal knew the cause. He had known it from the moment he had caught Will's scent in his office those few weeks ago. He had attempted to steer Will away from physiological causes, but the empath had insisted on having tests done. Hannibal had had to do some manipulating in order to end up with the outcome of his choosing. He had thought the multiple tests would have convinced Will by now, but Will was a stubborn creature. And as Will had put it, he didn't want to believe that he was crazy.

Hannibal chopped herbs and kneaded them into the liver with care. The frequency with which Will's episodes were coming had started to alarm the younger man. Hannibal could smell the fever burning hotter. He could smell the inflammation growing stronger. But he had a little more time before he had to extinguish the blaze. He would never admit it aloud, but he hoped that he could mold Will's mind enough in that time frame. He knew how Will felt about him, but he wasn't sure it was enough. He wasn't sure how the younger man would react upon finding out that Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper. But the more he nurtured and kneaded Will's mind, the better the results should be. And the longer Hannibal could draw out his encephalitis, the easier that manipulation would become.

Hannibal adjusted the food on the pan to his liking. He turned to the oven, opened the door, and slid the pan into the preheated oven. He set the timer and removed his apron. He retrieved a glass from the cabinet and the bottle of wine he had set out on the counter before he began cooking. He filled the glass and took a sip. Will and Alana would arrive soon.

Will drove himself from Hannibal's office, against the doctor's request. He assured Hannibal that he was fine and that his episodes generally stemmed from being forced to look at crime scenes. It was a lie, of course. He knew it, and from the look he was given, he was sure Hannibal did as well. But the latter hadn't argued and Will was relieved to get behind the wheel of his own vehicle.

He wanted to change before dinner. And the dogs needed to be fed. They clamored at his feet as soon as he entered the front door. Will whipped up a batch of food and when all dogs were satisfied, he went to the bedroom to change his clothes.

He shed his jeans and plaid shirt, leaving them on the floor by the dresser as he went to the closet. He rifled through the options, settling on a navy blue dress shirt he had only worn a couple of times. He pulled on a pair of black slacks and tucked in the shirt. He picked up a small mirror from the top of the dresser and ran a hand through his hair a few times. Sure he wasn't making it look any better, he put the mirror down and grabbed his jacket. He patted the dogs on his way out.

Will arrived at Hannibal's an hour later. He had already spent an hour driving home and he was ready to get out of the car. Normally, he wouldn't have spent two hours driving back and forth, but he was meant to spend the night with Hannibal, and he had no one to feed his dogs while he was away.

As Will pulled into the driveway, he noticed Alana's car was already there. He glanced towards the front door as he exited the vehicle and saw her standing on the porch. He walked up the steps to join her as she rang the doorbell.

"Good evening, Doctor Bloom," Will said, offering a smile that felt awkward on his face.

Alana returned the gesture, her blue eyes sparkling in the setting sunlight. "Good evening, Will."

That was the extent of their conversation before the front door swung inward. On the other side of the threshold, Hannibal stood in a pair of black trousers and waistcoat over a cranberry dress shirt and a matching tie. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He offered a smile to the two of them.

"Good evening, Alana. Good evening, Will." He opened the door wider and stood aside. "Please, come in."

Will gestured for Alana to go first and then he followed her in. Will removed his jacket and Hannibal took it, hanging it on the coat rack beside the door. Then he hung Alana's as well. Hannibal escorted them to the dining room where he poured two glasses of wine, handing one to each of them.

"Please, make yourselves comfortable. Dinner will be ready shortly."

"Thank you, Hannibal," Alana said, offering a gracious and comfortable smile.

Will nodded and the corners of his mouth twitched.

When Hannibal had exited the room, Will walked to the fireplace. The crackling warmth felt good against his skin.

"How are you feeling?" Alana started. Her voice was low and her words slow. She may as well have donned a pair of kid gloves.

“About the same as the last time you asked me that.” He lifted the wine glass and took a sip. The taste was strong and sweet but burned the back of his throat on the way down.

“What does Hannibal say about it?”

Will watched the flames leap and dance. After a few seconds, he furrowed his brow and turned just enough so that he could see Alana standing at the end of the table.

“About what exactly?”

“I asked you if you feel unstable, and you said yes. I am wondering what Hannibal has to say about that.”

Will turned around the rest of the way and walked to the edge of the table. He took another sip and set his glass down. He was nearly an arm’s length away from Alana.

“I believe those conversations are privileged.” He forced a smile and wondered how genuine it looked to her.

Alana didn’t smile back. She tilted her head to one side and stared into his eyes. Will looked away.

“Sure, they can be. Hannibal can’t tell me what you two have discussed.” She took a small step forward, and Will resisted the urge to move away. “But you could tell me. If you wanted.”

“Why would I do that?” Will asked, genuinely curious about the answer.

“I’m your friend Will. If there’s anything you’d like to talk about, I’m here.”

Will stared down at his glass of wine on the table. He watched the tranquil surface of the crimson liquid. While he gathered his thoughts, the surface was disturbed. Ripples formed and moved outwards. Black spikes emerged from the blood red liquid, gradually forming into long and spindly antlers. Will closed his eyes.

“Will?” Alana’s voice was muffled and distant. But it was enough to bring him back to reality.

Will opened his eyes and looked at her. Her eyebrows pulled together, forming deep creases between them.

“I think you were right,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“About us. About...me.” He stepped away from her and returned to the fireplace. “Rejecting me was the smart thing to do.”

“Will, I...”

He waited for her to finish, but she didn't. He heard quiet footsteps behind him and then she appeared out of the corner of his eye. He glanced towards her without making eye contact. She stood right next to him, turned to face him.

"I never intended to hurt you, Will."

Will exhaled, a sound that fell somewhere between a laugh and a snort. "As I said, it was the smart thing to do." He turned his head to look at her, meeting her eyes for a few moments as he added, "For both of us."

Her expression changed. The corners of her mouth turned downward and the sparkle in her eyes was gone. If Will hadn't known better, he would have thought she looked hurt.

She opened her mouth and looked like she was about to speak but was interrupted.

"Please, have a seat," Hannibal said.

Will and Alana both turned to watch Hannibal enter the room with two plates in hand and a third balanced on a forearm. He had put on a black suit jacket before returning to the dining room.

Will retrieved his wine glass and sat down across from Alana.

Hannibal set the first plate down in front of Alana. "Tandoori liver in smoked paprika and marmalade sauce."

"This smells amazing, Hannibal," she said.

He offered a small smile and moved to the other side of the table to place a plate in front of Will. Will looked down at the food arranged neatly around the fine China. It looked as delicious as it smelled.

While Hannibal rattled off the history of the dish, Will glanced at Alana. Her attention was on Hannibal and she smiled as he spoke, the sparkle returning to her eyes. Will's stomach seized and he knew it wasn't from hunger.

"I hope I did not interrupt anything important," Hannibal said.

Will looked at him, confused.

Hannibal looked back and forth between the two of them.

"Not at all," Alana said, probably realizing Will wasn't going to respond.

Will picked up his fork and poked at what looked like a tiny, grilled orange.

"Will and I simply realized we are of the same opinion."

"May I ask on what topic?"

"It's not important," Will said quickly. He glanced at Hannibal who stared back at him with an expression that looked more amused than Will felt comfortable with. Will averted his eyes and retrieved his knife. He cut into the meat and brought a piece to his mouth. It was tender and cooked to perfection. He kept his eyes on his plate as he said, "This liver is delicious."

Will wriggled out of his shirt and slacks and dropped them on the bedroom floor. He opened the dresser Hannibal had allocated for him weeks earlier and found a T-shirt and a pair of pajama pants. As he pulled them on, he turned away from the dresser to face Hannibal. The doctor was shirtless and had already changed his pants. Will caught his eyes which were downcast. Will followed their gaze to Will's discarded clothing on the floor. Will couldn't help his smirk. Hannibal met his eyes a moment later and Will waited for an admonishment, but it didn't come. Hannibal instead turned away and walked to the edge of the bed where he threw back the duvet. Will left the clothes where they were, fairly certain the untidiness wouldn't kill the doctor overnight, and crawled into bed next to Hannibal.

Will lay on his back and Hannibal propped up on an elbow beside him.

"What is your aversion to revealing our relationship to our friends?" Hannibal asked.

Will's lips parted but he didn't know what to say. Hannibal's affinity for bluntness was equal parts refreshing and nerve-wracking for Will.

Hannibal reached over and placed his palm on Will's chest, fingers lightly rubbing over Will's shirt. "I might have overheard your conversation," the doctor admitted without shame.

"Has anyone ever told you that it is impolite to eavesdrop?"

Hannibal smiled. "My apologies, dear Will."

"I'm just not ready."

"Why is that?"

Will let out a sigh and stared at the ceiling. "Jack would chastise me for getting into a relationship with my unofficial therapist, and Alana would accuse me of trying to replace my affections for her by turning them on someone else."

"Is that what you are doing?" Hannibal asked. His voice was not laden with accusation or even curiosity. He sounded like he did when the two of them were in his office together. Like he did when he tried to prod Will into reflecting on himself.

"No," Will said. His voice was quiet and he turned his head to look at Hannibal.

"Why would it bother you if they thought those things?"

Will brought both hands up and scrubbed them over his face. He let them drop to his sides again, resting on the bed. "Jack is already pushing me enough. I don't need the added grief."

"No," Hannibal said. "I certainly agree with you on that."

"It's one less thing to worry about."

Hannibal made a sound deep in his throat.

"What?" Will asked. "You don't agree?"

"I fear the extra effort to keep our relationship a secret is causing additional stress for you."

"You want to tell them?"

"I don't want you stressed more than you need to be."

"Telling them would cause me stress. Keeping it from them isn't so bad."

"Okay," Hannibal said after several moments.

"Are you upset by that?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure, Will." Hannibal smiled.

"So it won't be a problem for you?"

"No." Hannibal leaned close and pressed his lips to Will's cheek. Then he whispered, "I am good at keeping secrets."

"Besides," Will said, closing his eyes. "I don't want to jinx it."

Hannibal remained silent, but Will could still feel the doctor's warm breath on his cheek. Will re-opened his eyes and looked at the other man.

Hannibal wasn't exactly smiling but his expression was one of amusement.

"What?" Will asked in a sigh.

"A jinx is nothing more than superstition for people who are too afraid or incapable of creating their own destinies." Hannibal paused, and Will let that sink in. "You are more than capable of creating your own destiny, Will."

Will studied the doctor's face. The amusement had vanished.

"Superstition is an ill-fitting suit in your wardrobe."

"All of my suits are ill-fitting, according to you."

Hannibal smiled and slipped his hand beneath Will's shirt. Will anticipated a chill against his skin, but the doctor's hand was warmer than expected.

As Hannibal rubbed Will's stomach in slow, gentle circles, he leaned in close and whispered, "Perhaps something will have to be done about that."

Will leaned against the counter, watching Hannibal knead herbs into a chunk of meat. Will didn't know what the dish was called – or even what type of meat the doctor was cooking – but he didn't need to. He knew it would be delicious once Hannibal had finished.

"Tell me more about the case," Hannibal prodded.

Will had been discussing the human bowling ball with Hannibal for the past ten minutes. "Jack keeps asking me – hounding me, more like – about whether or not this is the Ripper."

"Is it?" Hannibal asked without missing a beat.

"I think so."

"What has you doubting?"

Will shook his head.

"Is there something different about this murder?"

"No," Will said, his voice quiet. "There's something different about me."

Hannibal stopped kneading and looked up. Will pushed off the counter and folded his arms across his chest.

"I am not sure I can trust my own judgment anymore."

"I have not known your hallucinations and lost time to affect the way you analyze a crime scene when you have all the facts."

"No." Will shrugged a shoulder. "That's true."

"Have you had any more episodes?"

Will glanced at the doctor who stared at him with piercing brown eyes. Will looked away again without answering.

"You did not tell me."

"I didn't want to worry you."

"I am as worried as I have always been. You were not concerned with worrying me before we began a romantic relationship."

Will ran a hand through his messy hair.

"I am not just your boyfriend, Will. Jack wants me here as your therapist. I want that as well. But I cannot do my job properly if you will not talk to me."

"Okay," Will said, his voice clipped. Feeling chastised, he folded his arms tightly again and stared down at the counter top.

"Tell me about this killer."

Will inhaled deeply, letting it out slowly. He closed his eyes and said, "There is something about the victim he couldn't tolerate. Something that didn't sit right with him. It's like he thought the man was garbage." Will opened his eyes and let his arms hang at his sides. "He deserved to be humiliated. To be left in public in such a shameful way."

"Why would the killer want that?"

"The man offended him."

"How?"

"With ugliness."

"Ugliness?" Hannibal repeated, his accent heavy on the word.

"He was making him beautiful," Will said, more as a thought to himself.

"How was he making him beautiful?"

Will's eyes darted back and forth but he no longer saw the kitchen before him. He stared at the man, broken and manipulated and bound together on the bowling lane.

"He is a work of art. Just like the other pieces. The other *kills*. This is the Chesapeake Ripper. He has taken someone he has deemed worthy of mocking and has created a work of art."

Will closed his eyes. The human bowling ball unfolded before him, and now Will stared down at him as he lay discolored and eviscerated on the autopsy table.

"The Ripper took a piece of him. Either as a trophy or as a testimony."

"A testimony of what?" Hannibal asked. He appeared on the other side of the table as Will looked down at the dead man.

"A testimony of the man's unworthiness. He did not deserve to be whole, even in death. He is something less. Something less than human."

"If the killer was offended by him, he may very well think that."

Will looked away from Hannibal and down at the body between them. He lowered his voice and said, "You deserve to be humiliated for your indecency."

“Indecency,” Hannibal repeated. “You believe he was displayed this way for his rudeness.”

Will stared down at the body without answering. The dead man’s face changed, the pallid color of death giving way to a healthy hue. The abdominal wound closed itself and the man’s eyes opened.

Will’s stomach tightened as the room around them changed. Will was seated at a table across from Hannibal, cutlery clinking in the expansive and luxuriously adorned dining room. Will’s plate was nearly empty as a man approached the table. He wore a smile that seemed out of place and less than genuine. He introduced himself as the restaurant owner, asked about their experience so far, and then Hannibal requested his business card.

Will blinked and the man was gone. His plate had grown fuller and his wine glass was nearly filled to the brim. He heard raised voices and followed them with his eyes. The kitchen door swung open and he saw two men standing on the tile on the other side. One he didn’t recognize but the other was the restaurant owner. The latter yelled at the other, cowering man. Will glanced at Hannibal whose eyes were on the meal in front of him.

Will opened his eyes, and inhaled deeply. He was back in Hannibal’s kitchen. His chest ached as though he had been holding his breath for a long time. He leaned against the kitchen counter and panted.

“Will?” Hannibal said.

Will’s stomach tightened and he didn’t look up. His thoughts swam wildly in his head and he couldn’t grasp a single one. But he knew. He knew something he didn’t want to know, and he forced his mind to focus elsewhere.

“Are you okay?” Hannibal asked.

Will looked up enough to see the doctor grab a towel from the counter and wipe his hands on it. Will couldn’t look up any further. He couldn’t look Hannibal in the face. He couldn’t see what he knew he would see. Something he hadn’t seen before but had somehow always been aware of.

“Yes,” Will whispered his lie.

But was it a lie?

Something inside of him felt free. Felt liberated. He had known something was off for a long time, but he had never allowed himself to think on it. He had never allowed himself to know it. And now that he did, he didn’t have to pretend. He no longer had to try to keep it at bay. He took in a deep breath and let it calm him as he exhaled. But when he looked up, the calmness vanished.

Hannibal had always been adept at holding eye contact, frequently well past the point that felt comfortable or appropriate for Will. But this time, Hannibal’s stare seemed longer than usual. He looked at Will with piercing eyes. Knowing eyes. Dangerous eyes. Bile burned the back of Will’s throat. He no longer felt free.

Flight Risk

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 Summary:

After discovering Hannibal's secret, Will's attempt to flee is not well-received.

Chapter Notes

For this fic, I have essentially picked up Hannibal's home and dropped it in a slightly more secluded location. ;D

Hannibal saw it in Will's eyes. The feral, fearful look of someone recognizing danger. Hannibal held in his sigh. His thoughts were ambivalent. A part of him felt relieved that Will had discovered this aspect of him. This aspect that he had worked so hard to hide from the rest of the world. Hannibal had wanted Will to know. He had wanted him to find out. But the other part of him worried it was too soon.

Hannibal set the towel down and stalked around the counter until he stood next to his lover. His patient. His friend. His possible downfall.

Will stood in place. He turned around as Hannibal approached but he did not run as Hannibal had expected. Instead, he stretched his arms out to his sides and braced himself against the counter as he leaned back into it. He stared at the floor, shoulders rising and falling with his heavy breaths.

"Will, I had hoped that you would not find out this way," Hannibal said, his voice gentle. "Or this soon."

Will lifted his head but didn't look at Hannibal. His brow pulled together tightly. "You wanted me to find out?"

"Eventually, yes."

"Why?" Will asked. His voice was raspy and barely more than a whisper.

"I want you to know all of me."

Will let out a sound that was not quite a laugh.

"I am still the same person you have known all of these months."

Will closed his eyes and shook his head, but it didn't seem to be in disagreement. The revelation was overwhelming the empath in the moment. Hannibal wanted to explain himself – he wanted to force his viewpoint on Will – but he refrained from piling on. It would only make things worse.

Will would need time to process – time to absorb what he had learned – and think it over. Hannibal hoped the empath would come to terms with it and be able to accept Hannibal completely, but the revelation had come too soon. Hannibal had not had sufficient time to mold Will's mind. Obtaining acceptance from him had suddenly become a much more difficult task.

Will said nothing and Hannibal waited at his side until the *beep* from the oven timer filled the room. He gave Will a long look and then moved back around to the other side of the counter. He opened the preheated oven, feeling the warmth wash out over him. He turned and picked up the pan from the counter. As he slid it into the oven, he heard the clacking of boot heels on the hardwood kitchen floor. He glanced over in time to see Will dart out of the room.

Hannibal sighed and closed the door, re-setting the oven timer. Then he removed his apron and laid it on the counter before going after his lover.

Hannibal hurried through the house. As he reached the front door, he noticed Will had left it ajar. Hannibal opened it enough to slip through and pulled it closed behind him. Will was halfway through the field as Hannibal descended the front steps. He jogged across the driveway and then broke out into a full sprint. Will was faster than Hannibal had anticipated. But the doctor was in better shape and, as he ran, he closed the gap between them.

Will didn't follow the road away from the house. Instead, he ran towards the dense trees to the east. It was the direction of Hannibal's closest neighbor, but they were still half a mile away. Hannibal knew what to expect once they penetrated the tree line. The ground inclined steadily. He doubted Will knew that.

When Will reached the trees, Hannibal was only a few yards behind him. Will stumbled on the uneven ground but kept his balance. Hannibal leapt nimbly over fallen branches and maneuvered through the trees with the agility of a springbok. As he closed in on Will, he could hear the smaller man's labored breathing.

Hannibal trailed him a few more feet before he grabbed him from behind. He had a handful of Will's shirt in his grasp and he yanked the man backwards. Will was caught off balance and fell back into Hannibal. The latter slammed back into a tree and wrapped both arms around Will. One was nestled around Will's neck and the other kept it in place. Will struggled against the hold that threatened to choke him, but Hannibal kept from putting too much pressure into it.

"Stop fighting me," Hannibal said, his voice almost flat.

Will didn't listen.

“Stop fighting me,” Hannibal growled.

Will’s body remained tense but his struggle lessened.

“You have two choices,” Hannibal said. “I can increase the pressure until you pass out and then I will carry you back to the house. Or you can stop fighting me and I will allow you to walk back to the house on your own two feet.”

Hannibal felt Will’s body relax. The latter held onto Hannibal’s arms but he had ceased fighting.

“Tell me your decision,” Hannibal said.

“I will walk back,” Will whispered.

Hannibal swallowed his sigh of relief. Keeping his hold on Will, he turned them both around. Then, he let go of Will and nudged him forward. Will panted as he walked down the hill. He didn’t turn around once as he walked back towards the house. Hannibal kept a safe distance – close enough that he could easily catch Will if the man decided to run again, but not so close that Will could whip around and attack Hannibal if he developed that urge.

But Will didn’t run or attack. They returned to the house without another incident. Will walked inside and stopped in the entryway. Hannibal closed the door and locked it.

“Come on,” Hannibal said. He wrapped his fingers around Will’s bicep and ushered him back to the kitchen where they waited for dinner to finish cooking. He let go of Will when they reached the edge of the counter. “I cannot allow you to leave,” Hannibal said. “Not while I am unsure of how you feel or what you would do once you were free.”

“I don’t know what I would do.”

“I am aware that you need time to process.”

Will nodded.

“I would like to allow you some space, but I need an assurance that you will behave. That you will not run again. Can you give me that?”

“Yes,” Will whispered.

“I need to hear it.”

“I will not run again,” Will said, meeting Hannibal’s eyes for the first time since re-entering the house.

Hannibal didn’t bother to hide his smile.

He requested that Will take a seat on the plush chair in the corner of the kitchen. When Will complied, Hannibal went to work preparing dessert. When the timer sounded, Hannibal

removed dinner from the oven and replaced it with dessert. He plated the food with extra care, and then he and Will re-located to the dining room.

Will ate a little but mostly poked at the food with his fork. Despite not liking Will's lack of appetite, Hannibal understood it, and he didn't push Will on it.

All through dinner, Will tried to devise a plan of escape. He had promised Hannibal he wouldn't run, but it had been a lie. He had only said that to avoid whatever punishment he would have incurred had he not promised. He wasn't sure what that punishment might be, but he wasn't keen on the idea of finding out.

Will had barely eaten anything. He noticed Hannibal watching him several times throughout dinner, but the doctor didn't once mention Will's lack of appetite. And when Hannibal set dessert down in front of Will, he didn't seem surprised when Will hardly touched it.

When dinner and dessert were finished, Will expected to be forced to stay in the kitchen once again, but that was not the case. Hannibal had poured a glass of wine and shoved it into Will's hand. The doctor told him to go relax and Hannibal would find him after cleaning up so that they could talk. Will was hesitant to comply but ultimately turned around and walked away with his glass of wine in hand.

Will ended up in Hannibal's office. He wished it had a lock on it but knew there wasn't one, so he had to settle for latching it closed instead. He knew this was a test. Hannibal didn't trust him. How could he? Especially after Will had tried to run away just an hour earlier. But Will also knew that this might be the only alone time he would receive for a long time. He had to take advantage of it.

Will set the wine glass down on Hannibal's desk and crept to the windows along the south wall. Two of the floor-to-ceiling windows looked out on the backyard. The other two faced the front yard. Those were his best shot at getting away.

He glanced over his shoulder at the office door. He knew that if Hannibal heard him, he would only have a few moments to make his escape. He turned back to the window and found the latch. He unlocked it and popped it open, cringing at the awful sound it made. If Hannibal were nearby, there was no doubt he had heard that sound. Will perched on the ledge of the open window, caught his balance, and hopped down to the ground.

Hannibal poured Will a glass of wine and sent him out of the kitchen. He gave his lover a few moments before he followed. He crept into the hallway and saw the door to his study close, the latch clicking into place. Hannibal moved closer, standing against the wall to one side of the door, listening for movement from Will.

It was relatively quiet for a few minutes. The only sound he could hear was the gentle patter of Will's feet on the Persian rugs. But it didn't take long for another sound to pique Hannibal's interest.

A shrill squeak emitted from the room and Hannibal knew Will had opened the window. It was nearly winter, and Hannibal kept his house regulated to a comfortable temperature. One which would not warrant Will opening a window for fresh air.

Hannibal turned the knob and pushed the door in. The window hung open and Will's wine glass sat untouched on the desk.

Hannibal hadn't been foolish enough to expect Will to keep his promise and stay put, and a part of him was glad when he opened the door to find the study empty. It gave him an excuse to do what he thought he might have to, whether Will had behaved himself or not.

He left the door to his study open and rushed to the armoire in the entryway. He found his old medical bag and rummaged inside, quickly locating one of his syringes.

The moment Will's feet hit the ground, he darted across the lawn. He ran alongside the house and as he reached the front, he heard the door open. His stomach tightened but he didn't stop and he didn't look behind him. He needed to keep moving.

He set his sights on the tree line he had run for the last time. He knew Hannibal's closest neighbors were a fair trek away, but it was the only hope he had. He kept his focus on the trees, his legs burning with each stride. But he had barely made it past the driveway when he heard footsteps close behind him. He couldn't look back. He had to keep going. He had to outrun Hannibal this time.

But he couldn't. As soon as he thought it, he felt Hannibal's hands on his biceps. They grabbed a hold of him tightly and Will was knocked off balance. He started to fall but was caught before he hit the ground.

Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will in a vice-like bear hug. Will struggled for freedom, but his arms were pinned to his body. Hannibal was too strong. Will couldn't fight him off. Moments later, Will was being dragged back towards the house.

"Let me go," Will said between panting breaths.

Hannibal said nothing as he dragged Will in through the door he had left open.

"Hannibal!"

When Hannibal didn't comply or respond, Will used the only weapon at his disposal. He drew his leg forward and then snapped it backwards, aiming for Hannibal's knee. But Will was off balance and couldn't see where he was kicking. He grazed the side of Hannibal's leg with his heel, not warranting any kind of reaction from the doctor. Will changed tactics. He set his feet down solidly on the floor and thrust himself up and backwards. The sudden change in weight seemed to shake Hannibal's balance. Will kicked his legs out in front of him, looking for any kind of leverage to help him take them both to the floor. His foot connected with the edge of the open door but instead of helping his cause, it whipped closed, crashing loudly against the frame.

Hannibal regained his balance and tightened his grip on Will. He twisted around and slammed the smaller man to the floor. Breath knocked out of him, Will tried to scramble to his feet but Hannibal was too quick.

The stronger man was on Will in an instant, digging a knee into the small of Will's back. He pinned Will's neck down with a forearm, forcing the side of Will's face into the ornate Persian rug.

"Calm down," Hannibal said, his voice gentle and composed.

Will didn't listen. He struggled to get free, even throwing an arm back to claw at Hannibal.

Hannibal removed the pressure from the back of Will's neck and pinned his arm to the floor. Will lifted his head but was met with Hannibal's other knee. He found it difficult to breathe, and he couldn't move, but that didn't stop him from trying. Every muscle in his body tensed up as he fought, in vain, to free himself.

"Stop, Will."

"Get off me," Will growled into the rug.

Hannibal didn't reply and Will shifted as much as he could to glance over his shoulder at the doctor. Hannibal had one hand free and he slid it into his pocket, removing it moments later with his fingers wrapped around a syringe.

"No," Will breathed.

"Stop fighting me, Will."

Hannibal's words had the opposite effect. Will fought more, his muscles aching from the wasted struggle.

Will couldn't help but think about what was in that syringe. Was it something to knock him out? Or worse? Will fought harder but he was no match for the larger and stronger Hannibal.

"Calm down," Hannibal repeated evenly.

Will felt his pants being pulled down off of his hip. "No, Hannibal," he said, his voice raspy and weak.

"Shh."

He felt a pinprick sting his hip, and then a pressured warmth blossomed under his skin.

"Stop," he murmured.

As the warmth spread throughout his bloodstream, the pressure on top of him lessened. Hannibal had moved. Will wanted to scramble to his feet. He wanted to run. He tried to, but his limbs wouldn't comply.

He felt gentle fingers snake through his hair. Hannibal leaned close to his face and whispered, "You're going to be fine."

Will had to get up. He had to get free. Now was his chance. But his eyelids drooped and his muscles were heavy and sore. All he could do was close his eyes.

An Empath Imprisoned

Chapter Summary

Will has trouble adjusting to life in captivity.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Will awoke, a part of him was surprised. Hannibal's words came back to him -- *You're going to be fine* – but Will hadn't believed him. A part of him thought he might never wake up again. The other part knew that if he did, nothing would be fine for him.

Will shook the angst from his head and opened his eyes. His vision was blurry, making the dim room more difficult to see. His head pounded. His muscles ached. He stared at the ceiling, listening to the rhythm of his own breathing until his vision cleared enough to see. He glanced around the room and he felt a twinge in his stomach. The room was familiar, reminding him of Hannibal's bedroom, a place where he had always felt safe. But it was not entirely the same. The duvet was a different color and the furniture was not in the same place. But there was no mistaking the style. It was Hannibal's. He decided he must be in the guest bedroom, and while that thought should have terrified him, he was oddly comforted by the mahogany furniture and chic fabrics and eclectic patterns.

Will let his gaze wash over the room. He took in the door with the sliver of light beneath it that must have led out to the hallway. He noticed the second door across from the foot of the bed that hung ajar. As his focus wandered towards the windows to his left, he noticed movement in the corner of the room.

A figure rose from the shadows and approached the bed. As it got closer, the shape transformed into a familiar one. Hannibal gently took a seat on the edge of the bed. Will looked him over. He was dressed differently than before. He wore a dark green dress shirt and black pants, but he had no jacket or waistcoat.

"How are you feeling?" Hannibal asked, his voice even and clinical.

Will's stomach seized. "How am I feeling?" Will mocked, emphasizing the last word. He let out a laugh that sounded strangled and hoarse.

"Are you in any pain?" Hannibal asked, seemingly unfazed by Will's disposition.

"Physically, or...?"

"Physically. Yes."

Will shook his head. It wasn't so much in answer but rather in disbelief at the situation. Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper. Not only did he murder innocent people on a regular basis, but he had hidden it from Will. He had lured Will in, making him believe that Hannibal was a good and decent person who actually cared for him. But now...

Now he wanted to kill Hannibal. He wanted to wrap his hands around the man's throat and squeeze until his eyes popped out of their sockets. He could do it. He just had to try.

Will let out a growl as he flung his hands towards Hannibal. But there was a pain in his wrists and he couldn't move them far. There was a loud clanking noise as he relaxed his arms. He tilted his head back to look up at the headboard. His wrists were bound by a short chain and secured to the bed with a padlock. He pulled again, but his restraints wouldn't allow him much movement.

"I apologize for having to do this," Hannibal said.

"You don't *have* to do this."

Hannibal reached out a hand and Will flinched. Hannibal held his hand still for a moment and then continued towards Will. He brushed his fingers along Will's cheek. The sensation was warm and familiar, and Will closed his eyes as they began to sting.

"Would you like to talk about this?" Hannibal asked.

"No," Will said, almost before Hannibal had finished asking.

"This isn't permanent," Hannibal said.

Will opened his eyes and met the doctor's gaze. "Just until you kill me, right?"

Will thought he saw the doctor flinch at that. Will would have smiled if he hadn't believed his own words.

"I'm not going to kill you, Will."

Will shook his head and looked up at the ceiling. He felt Hannibal's hand on his arm. The doctor's fingers wrapped around Will's forearm and Will expected him to squeeze until it hurt, but he didn't. Instead, Hannibal brushed a thumb over Will's skin. Then, he gave a gentle squeeze and let go. Hannibal stood up, the bed moving slightly with the change in pressure.

"Get some rest, Will," Hannibal urged. "We will talk in the morning."

Will expected to lie in bed, tossing and turning for hours on end, but that was not the case. He fell asleep quickly, chasing away the residual effects of the serum in his blood. When he awoke again, sunlight streamed in around the heavy curtains in the bedroom. He glanced up at the headboard and gave his restraints a tug. His arms ached from the awkward position and

he hoped he wouldn't have to sleep that way every night. He was awake for only a few minutes before the bedroom door opened.

"Good morning," Hannibal said, closing the door behind him. He was dressed in a thick gray cable knit sweater but still wore his pajama bottoms.

"Good?" Will muttered.

Hannibal either didn't hear him, or chose to ignore him, as he walked around to Will's side of the bed. The doctor reached into the pocket of his pants and pulled something out. Will couldn't see what it was, but then Hannibal leaned over him. Will tensed, but the doctor didn't touch him. He reached up to the restraints, and Will saw a small key in Hannibal's hand as he worked it into the padlock. Hannibal was so close and as Will breathed, the doctor's spicy scent wafted into his nose. His body relaxed without his permission.

The padlock popped open and Hannibal worked it free of the chains. He unwound the restraints from Will's wrists and laid the length of chain on the nightstand. Will brought his arms down, his stiff shoulders protesting with pain. He rubbed at his wrists, noting the indentations left in his skin.

"I imagine you are in need of a trip to the bathroom," Hannibal said.

Will nodded.

Hannibal stepped back from the edge of the bed and waved a hand towards the bathroom door. Will swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat up, swallowing a groan as his muscles ached with each movement. He tilted his head side to side, stretching the soreness from his neck. Then he stood up, avoiding Hannibal's gaze as he walked to the bathroom.

He closed the door behind him and turned on the light in the windowless room. He had been in the guest bathroom once before and knew there was a lock on it. He half expected it to be gone but when he reached for it, it was still in place. He turned the lock, allowing himself some much needed privacy.

Will used the bathroom in peace. He glanced at the shower, knowing he could use one, but he wasn't sure he had the energy or desire for that at the moment. He found his toothbrush in an empty glass on the sink and a tube of toothpaste next to it. He assumed Hannibal must have brought them in sometime in the night.

Will squirted some toothpaste on the brush and began to brush his teeth. His mind wandered to Hannibal. Calm, calculated, helpful Hannibal. Who also happened to be a sadistic murderer.

All of this time. All of those people. Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will's stomach tightened at the thought.

How could this be possible?

Will thought about all of the crime scenes he had been called to. All of the bodies ripped apart and displayed like corporeal art. Carefully orchestrated in such a grotesque manner by the same hands that caressed his face on a daily basis. The same hands that held his in what he had always thought was a loving manner.

Will's stomach churned. He dropped the toothbrush in the sink and rushed to the toilet. He had barely braced himself against the bowl before his stomach heaved, emptying its contents into the toilet.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice came from the other side of the door.

Will's throat burned with the taste of bile and mint. Before he had a chance to answer, his stomach seized again and he retched into the toilet.

The bathroom door handle jiggled but the door didn't open.

"Will?" Hannibal said again. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Will lied.

"Open the door, please."

Will hit the flusher lever and when the toilet filled with cleaner water, he got to his feet. He walked to the door and unlocked it. Then he turned around and went back to the sink.

The door opened and Hannibal came in. Will glanced in the mirror as the doctor walked up behind him. Will averted his eyes and looked down at the toothbrush he had dropped in the sink. He picked it up and rinsed it off, re-applying toothpaste.

"Are you sick?" Hannibal asked.

Will wanted to laugh. It wouldn't have been a happy or amused laugh though. He wanted to scowl and say that Hannibal was the sick one. He wanted to recount all of the things that had repulsed him moments ago. The things that made him despise Hannibal now. But he didn't. Instead, he shook his head, feeling too drained to do anything else.

He felt Hannibal's hand between his shoulder blades, rubbing lightly. Will shrugged him off. Hannibal moved his hand to Will's shoulder, squeezing gently. Will was about to move away but Hannibal dropped his hand before he could. Then the doctor turned and left the room, pulling the door closed behind him.

Will stared into the sink basin as he brushed his teeth a second time. When he finished, he filled the glass with water and rinsed his mouth out. Then he re-filled the glass and drank it dry before leaving the bathroom.

As Will entered the bedroom, Hannibal sat at the foot of the bed.

"How are you feeling?" Hannibal asked.

Will's mind flooded with countless bitter and sarcastic comments, but he settled for a question. "How do you think I'm feeling?"

"Confused and hurt, I imagine."

"Oh, I'm not confused," Will said. "Not anymore."

"No, I suppose not."

"Hurt, on the other hand." He met Hannibal's eyes and stared, unable to control the clenching in his jaw.

"I know you are. I am sorry for that."

"I don't understand how you could do those things."

"You are a true empath, Will. You can understand anyone's point of view."

"Well," Will mumbled. "Maybe I don't want to."

"I know it is overwhelming."

"Stop," Will snarled. "I don't want to talk about this."

"You know that we need to."

Will's stomach turned again. He put his hand to it, grimacing.

"In time," Hannibal said. He waited until Will dropped his hand to his side and then said, "Please, come here."

"No."

Hannibal tilted his head, his amber eyes full of curiosity.

"I don't want your comfort. I don't want to be near you."

"I do not plan to comfort you," Hannibal said. Then he reached behind him and lifted what looked to be a leather cuff. It was attached to another chain and Will followed the trail which led to the foot of the bed. It wrapped around the footboard and was secured by a thicker padlock than the one that had restrained his wrists. He had been so focused on Hannibal that he hadn't noticed it before.

"Oh."

"Please," Hannibal repeated. "Come over here."

Will walked to Hannibal and sat down on the foot of the bed. He turned to face Hannibal who pulled Will's right pant leg up and secured the leather cuff around his ankle, tightening it. He picked up a smaller padlock and locked the cuff.

“This will allow you to sleep more comfortably and give you more freedom to move about the room.”

“Freedom,” Will muttered.

“You should also be able to reach the bathroom with no difficulty.”

Will twisted his foot, trying to get used to the new sensation around his ankle. “Is this one permanent?”

“No, it’s not permanent,” Hannibal answered, his voice gentle and soothing.

Will sighed. “How long?”

“Until I can trust you again.”

Will frowned. “It might be permanent.”

Hannibal reached a hand towards him. Will tensed but didn’t swat the doctor away like his mind screamed at him to do. Hannibal brushed a lock of hair away from Will’s forehead. Then he grazed his fingers down Will’s cheek.

“It won’t be,” Hannibal said. “I promise.”

When Hannibal entered the guest bedroom with a neatly folded stack of clothing, Will was nowhere in sight. Hannibal walked to the foot of the bed to see that the chain was still secured to it. He followed the chain trail with his eyes until it disappeared into the bathroom. The door hung ajar because the chain prevented it from closing all the way. Light shone through the cracks between the door and the frame but the angle was wrong to get any sort of glimpse of Will.

Hannibal set the stack of clothing down on the foot of the bed. “Will?”

A moment later, Will’s voice came from the bathroom. “Yeah.”

“I brought you some clothes. If you would like to take a shower, you may.”

“The chain doesn’t reach that far.”

“I will unlock you.”

“Okay.”

Will emerged from the bathroom a short time later. He stood with his arms folded tightly across his narrow chest, staring at anything but Hannibal, it seemed.

“Come here, please,” Hannibal said and Will walked over to him. Hannibal sat down at the foot of the bed and patted the comforter beside him. Will sat next to him and then Hannibal

removed the small padlock key from his pocket and unlocked Will's ankle cuff.

Will slid his foot free and then waited until Hannibal gave him permission to go back into the bathroom. When Hannibal heard the shower faucet turn on, he stood up. As he left the room he noticed the stack of Will's clothing lying untouched at the foot of the bed.

Hannibal went downstairs and into his study. He retrieved a book on Grecian art and went back upstairs to the guest bedroom. He closed the bedroom door behind him and then sat in the chair in the corner of the room. He opened the book on his lap and waited for Will to finish his shower.

When the shower turned off, Hannibal checked his watch. Thirty minutes had passed. Will's shower was twice as long as normal, but Hannibal wasn't surprised. It was the only real freedom he had been allowed in days. A part of Hannibal was a little amazed that Will hadn't taken even longer.

Hannibal closed his book when the bathroom door opened. Will didn't immediately emerge and Hannibal couldn't see into the bathroom from his seat. He wanted to call to Will but swallowed his impatience.

A moment later, Will stepped onto the bedroom area rug. His thin frame was wrapped in a towel from the waist down. He glanced Hannibal's way without making eye contact, and then he walked to the foot of the bed and picked up the stack of clothes. He returned to the bathroom without a word and closed the door. Hannibal heard the lock click into place.

Hannibal re-opened his book and found his place, reading for the next few minutes before the bathroom door opened again. Hannibal slid the closed book between his leg and the arm of the chair. Will walked out of the bathroom, fully clad in the clothing Hannibal had brought for him. The jeans fit well but the dark green plaid shirt hung too loosely on his frame.

Hannibal sat forward on the edge of the chair. He was about to ask what Will would like for breakfast, but he had barely opened his mouth when Will darted towards the bedroom door.

Hannibal leapt to his feet and rushed across the room. When he reached Will, the latter had the bedroom door open. Hannibal shoved it closed and Will jumped. The smaller man reached for the door handle again, but Hannibal wrapped one arm around his midsection and another around his neck from behind, applying just enough pressure to keep Will from squirming free.

"Stop," Hannibal said, keeping his voice gentle and even. He was growing tired of the attempted escapes but he could understand them, so he tried to keep his annoyance at bay.

Will pawed at the arm around his neck. He squeezed Hannibal's forearm and tried to pull it away.

"Will," Hannibal said, putting some force behind his name. "Stop now, or I will be forced to subdue you."

Will hung onto Hannibal's arm but stopped fighting. Will panted, his breathing quick and audible.

"I want to trust you," Hannibal whispered close to Will's ear. "But you are making that very difficult."

"Likewise," Will hissed.

Hannibal nuzzled the side of Will's head, and then he buried his face in Will's neck, breathing in the empath's sweltering scent. Hannibal pressed his lips to the velvety skin beneath Will's jugular vein.

Will didn't lean in to it like he used to. But he didn't pull away either.

Will paced the bedroom floor. He was tired of sitting. Tired of sleeping. Tired of waiting for Hannibal to trust him again. If he were being honest with himself, he would know that would never happen. No, as far as Will was concerned, he would be locked up for the rest of his life.

He stood at the edge of the bed and propped his foot up on the disheveled comforter. He hadn't bothered making the bed. What was the point when he would be right back in it a short time later? There wasn't much to do but sleep. Will fidgeted with the ankle cuff. It was thick leather that, even with the proper tools, would take time to cut through. He tugged at the attached chain. It was secured tightly. He would never be able to get that free. Will let out a growl as he returned his foot to the floor. He resumed pacing.

He wasn't sure how much time had passed when light appeared beneath the bedroom door. Hannibal was home. *Had he been away?* Will didn't know what day it was. He had lost track.

The door opened and Hannibal entered. Will continued pacing.

"How are you doing this evening, Will?"

"How do you *think* I'm doing?"

"You sound agitated."

Will stopped in his tracks and turned to look at the doctor. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

Hannibal's expression changed.

Will knew that Hannibal was not a fan of swearing. He didn't find the words themselves offensive so much as the inane nature of them. *That language is best suited for the inelegant and uncultured*, Hannibal had once said. Will made a mental note to use those inane words more often.

"Tell me what's on your mind," Hannibal said.

"I want out of here," Will said, his voice louder than intended.

“I know that you do.”

Will lifted his eyebrows in question.

“I can’t let you out of here until I can trust you.”

“You are telling me you will never let me out of here.”

“That is not what I am telling you.”

Will narrowed his eyes. “You really think you can ever trust me again?”

“I would like to.”

“But do you think you will?”

“Yes,” Hannibal answered. “I do.”

Will scoffed and resumed pacing.

“What would you like for dinner?” Hannibal asked, his voice calm and casual as though he didn’t have his own boyfriend locked up in his home.

“Nothing,” Will muttered.

“I will bring you something when I finish.”

“I don’t want anything,” Will barked.

“You need to eat.”

Will shook his head.

“I will return in a short while.” Hannibal turned and left the room, leaving Will to his irritation.

Will continued to pace the floor, walking from one side of the bed around to the other. He even ventured into the bathroom every few passes, just for a change of scenery. He imagined picking up the lamp on the bedside table and throwing it at a wall. Watching it shatter into a million pieces and then waiting, with a grin on his face, for Hannibal to rush into the room to see what had happened. He imagined tossing the furniture around the room, seeing the expensive mahogany splinter into unsalvageable pieces. He wanted to tear the duvet and pillows apart, feathers and stuffing swarming the room like a blizzard.

But he didn’t. He wasn’t sure why. He wasn’t afraid of what Hannibal would do to him. He didn’t think the doctor was the torturing type, and he had already promised not to kill Will. Even if he were lying, would he really kill him for destroying the guest bedroom? It’s not like Hannibal ever slept there.

Will sat down on the edge of the bed. He stared at the light beneath the door for a long time without ever seeing shadows or any sign of movement. He sighed and lay back on the bed, his feet still on the floor.

When the bedroom door clicked open, Will sat up. He didn't think Hannibal had been gone very long, but when he stepped into the bedroom, the doctor had a plate of food in hand. Will instinctively inhaled, the delicious scents wafting into his nose.

No, Will told himself. *Don't give in.*

"I brought you dinner," Hannibal said.

"I don't want it."

"You should eat."

"I should be able to come and go as I please."

"Will," Hannibal said, his voice low.

Will looked at the man in front of him. The man he had watched countless times before. He didn't know how it was possible for someone to look so familiar and so unrecognizable at the same time.

"I said I don't fucking want it."

"You are being stubborn."

"Take this damn thing off my foot and—"

"You know I cannot do that."

"—let me go."

"Will, please have patience."

"Fuck you."

Hannibal stepped closer and Will flinched. The doctor's face was calm and he didn't look at all irritated by Will's behavior. Will sighed.

Hannibal held out the plate of food. "Please. Eat something."

Will stared up at the doctor for a long moment, and then he took the plate. Hannibal smiled gently. Will hurled the plate across the room, fine China and beautifully prepared food splattering all over the wall like shrapnel.

Will set his jaw and turned to look at Hannibal. The doctor's gaze was on the mess across the room, but he didn't look angry as Will had expected.

"I said I didn't want it," Will reiterated, keeping his voice as calm as he could.

“Yes, you did.” Hannibal turned back to Will, giving him a long look before he turned around and left the bedroom.

Satisfied with himself, Will crawled into bed. He heard the bedroom door open again a few minutes later and then a scratching sound that he assumed was Hannibal cleaning the wall and sweeping up the wasted food and broken dishware. Will refused to acknowledge Hannibal’s presence and the latter said nothing. When the bedroom door closed again, the sound was drowned out by the growling of Will’s stomach.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for continuing to read. :D There's still plenty more to come!

An Empath Imprisoned, Part 2

Chapter Summary

As Will endures more days of confinement, he is conflicted about his feelings towards Hannibal and wonders if he will ever know freedom again.

Will sat on the edge of the bed. His ankle itched beneath the cuff, but he refused to scratch at it. He didn't want to think about his situation any more than necessary. He thought ignoring it would make it stop, but the itch only grew worse. He stood up and paced the room.

The chain had allowed him more roaming space as Hannibal had promised, but he couldn't reach the far side of the room. The wall with the door. Not that it would matter if he could. Being able to open the door and not being able to leave would probably drive him crazier than not being able to reach the door at all.

Will glanced at the clock on the nightstand. 8:31. He was almost certain it was nighttime. The days and nights had started to run together for him. He looked towards the windows, noting the lack of light streaming in around the drapes. He walked to the window and pulled the drapes apart and then twisted the blinds open. It was nighttime all right.

He pulled a string hanging from the blinds and they moved upward, collapsing in on each other. Will pressed both palms to the window, the cool glass sending a chill up his arms. He leaned his face close and looked up at the night sky. He could just see the moon from his angle, off to the east.

He brought a hand back and then smacked it against the glass. The pane rattled beneath his palm. He wondered if Hannibal would hear him break it and how long it would take the doctor to get upstairs. Will wondered if he would have enough time to use a shard of glass to cut through the leather cuff around his ankle.

Will took a step back and balled his fist. He shielded his face with his free hand and ran his fist through the window. The glass shattered, shards singing as they fell to the floor. Will's fist ached and burned and he saw blood trailing various winding paths down the back of his hand, from knuckles to wrist.

Will looked to the window and noticed several shards still attached. He wrapped his bleeding hand around one and muscled it. The glass dug into his skin as he broke the shard free. There was a clicking sound behind him and he spun around to see Hannibal enter the room.

“Will?”

Will watched Hannibal's face as the doctor assessed the situation. He saw the broken window and then his eyes went to the shard of glass in Will's hand.

"You're bleeding," Hannibal said. He hurried around the bed to join Will. "Let me see it."

Will furrowed his brow. Hannibal seemed completely unconcerned about the crude weapon Will held. Will brought his hand up to make sure he still held the glass. The shard was there.

Hannibal gently took Will's wrist in his own hand. Will looked at the doctor who stared down at Will's injured hand, his expression calm.

"What have you done, love?"

Will shook his head. He was confused. But he had an opportunity and he couldn't squander it. He ripped his hand free from Hannibal's grasp. Then, he drew the shard back and plunged it into Hannibal's chest. The doctor's eyes went wide but he didn't make a sound. Will pulled the shard out and Hannibal fell against him, gripping Will tightly with both hands. But he wasn't trying to hurt Will. He seemed to be trying to keep his balance. Will slid his free hand to the back of Hannibal's head, his fingers snaking into the neatly groomed hair. Then, Will used the glass shard to pierce the side of Hannibal's neck.

Blood oozed out around the jagged glass. Will jerked the shard free and bright red liquid spewed from the wound like a geyser, redecorating the walls. Hannibal slid to the floor, blood staining the carpet in a quickly spreading blossom.

Will dropped the shard of glass to the floor. His hand stung. His head began to pound. His stomach tightened. He looked down at Hannibal who lay motionless on the carpet, eyes wide and lifeless.

"No," Will breathed. He sank to his knees beside the doctor and shook him. Hannibal didn't respond. Will leaned in close, putting his head to Hannibal's chest. He heard nothing.

What have I done?

Will no longer felt the desire to be free. He didn't want to go. He didn't want to leave. He couldn't abandon Hannibal now. He lay down beside his lover and stared into vacant eyes.

Will's head throbbed and he realized his eyes were closed. He opened them, feeling cool glass against his forehead. He frowned, staring into the side yard of Hannibal's house. The moon shone from above and Will pushed off the window, examining it as he stepped back. The glass was still intact. He whipped around and looked down at the floor. *No Hannibal*. And no blood staining the carpet. He looked at the walls. There were no blood spatters there either. Will's eyes darted around the room and he panted.

What the hell happened?

The bedroom door opened and Will jumped backwards, slamming into the window. The glass rattled and Hannibal stared at him from across the room.

"It's just me," the doctor said.

Will looked him over. There was no glass shard wound in his chest or spewing gash in his neck. Hannibal took his time crossing the room. Will met him halfway, unaware for several moments that he had been moving at all.

“What’s wrong?” Hannibal asked.

Will reached out a hand, noting the lack of blood this time. He put his palm to Hannibal’s chest. The doctor wrapped his fingers around Will’s wrist but he didn’t move it.

“Are you okay?” Will choked.

“Yes,” Hannibal said. Then a small frown creased his face and he put his free hand to Will’s cheek. “Are you?”

Will wasn’t sure how to answer that. His boyfriend was a serial killer. He was being held captive. He had just hallucinated killing his boyfriend-turned-captor. He didn’t know what was wrong with himself. But all he could think about was how relieved he was when he realized he had only been having a hallucination moments earlier.

“I’m okay now.”

“You are warm,” Hannibal said. He moved his hand to Will’s forehead. “Did you have another episode?”

Will nodded.

“Would you like to talk about it?”

Will’s stomach churned at the thought. “No,” he whispered. He hadn’t noticed that Hannibal had taken his hand until the doctor squeezed it.

“Come. Sit.”

Will let Hannibal lead him to the edge of the bed where they both sat down.

Will didn’t squeeze Hannibal’s hand, but he didn’t pull away either. He felt oddly comforted at the moment, seeing Hannibal alive and well. Just minutes earlier he had thought his therapist, his lover, his one true friend, was dead. He couldn’t bear the thought. Will’s stomach ached and he chased the thought from his mind. He had to focus on something else. Anything else. He thought of home and how, despite always feeling comfortable at Hannibal’s – as comfortable as could be expected, anyway – he missed his own place. His own bed. His dogs.

Will sighed. “How are the dogs?” He risked a glance at Hannibal.

The doctor smiled. “They are good.”

Will lifted his eyebrows. “Really?”

“Why are you surprised?”

“I didn’t know you were taking care of them.”

“Alana is taking care of them.”

“Oh.”

“She has been visiting your house daily to let them out and feed them.”

“That’s kind of her.”

“It is. She will take them soon, though.”

Will’s breath caught. “Take them where?” The question had come out more high-pitched than he had intended.

Hannibal reached over with his free hand and brushed hair from Will’s forehead. “To her house.”

“Oh.” Will exhaled audibly. “Good.”

“She wouldn’t give them away,” Hannibal said. “They are her only reminder of you.”

Will averted his eyes and stared down at the floor. “I miss them.”

“You will see them again.”

Will nodded, but not because he believed Hannibal. He wasn’t sure if he believed him or not. His thoughts were too confusing. Too convoluted. Like wandering an intricate maze in pitch blackness, under water.

“Where does she think I am?” Will asked after several moments had passed.

“She and Jack believe you are missing.”

Will furrowed his brow and looked at Hannibal.

“When Jack’s repeated calls to you went unanswered, he phoned me.”

“What did you say?”

“I told him I had not seen you since you left after dinner the night before he tried to call you.”

“Are they looking for me?”

“Yes.”

“Do they know my car is in the garage?”

“It isn’t.”

“What?”

“I moved it.”

“Oh.”

“They found it a few miles from here on the side of the road.”

“What do they think happened?”

“Alana has sided with my suggestion that something happened during one of your episodes.”

“And Jack?”

“Jack thinks it was the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Will held Hannibal’s gaze as long as he could before looking away. “Well, he’s not wrong.”

“No,” Hannibal said gently. “I suppose he isn’t.”

“Do they think I’m dead?”

“No.”

“Really?”

“Alana doesn’t want to believe that. And Jack refuses to believe he has lost someone else on his watch.”

“Always the sentimental man, Jack.” Will ran a hand through his hair. “How long until they stop searching?”

“I am not sure they ever will entirely.”

“What will you do about that?”

“You don’t need to concern yourself with those things.”

Will frowned. “When will you let me out?”

Hannibal rubbed the back of his hand with a thumb. Quietly, he said, “We have discussed this.”

Will looked at Hannibal who stared back at him with calm eyes. Will’s stomach didn’t hurt. His head didn’t pound. The sight of Hannibal didn’t make him want to scream or get sick or throw things. Will sighed.

“Soon,” Hannibal whispered as he leaned close. He pressed his lips to Will’s temple.

Will closed his eyes and Hannibal squeezed his hand.

More time passed and Will lost track of the days. Hannibal came in to visit as much as possible, when he was at home, but he spent the majority of the days at his office. Offering help – or manipulations, as the case may be – to unsuspecting patients. Will grew stir crazy, locked up all alone with no one to talk to, staring at the same four walls day in and day out. And Hannibal seemed no closer to trusting him than he had been the day Will had discovered his ominous secret.

Impatience bubbled in Will's chest. He couldn't wait to be set free. He had played along – *was he playing?* – as best he could, but the longer he remained captive, the tetchier he became.

Then one day, when Hannibal checked in on him after arriving home from work, Will started in on him. He demanded to be set free, insisting that he had played by the rules and hadn't done anything Hannibal hadn't wanted him to. Hannibal stared at him a long time and Will's chest swelled with hope. But when Hannibal denied Will his freedom once more, Will wanted to blow up at him. But he was so disheartened that he couldn't find the energy. Without a word, he had crawled into bed to sleep off his increasing depression.

Will spent the next few days giving Hannibal the cold shoulder. Nothing else had worked, so he tried the new approach. Hannibal would sit down on the bed beside him and try to coax him into conversation, but Will refused. Even when the doctor would take his hand or kiss his cheek, Will denied him any amount of affection. And when Hannibal brought in food, Will wouldn't eat. The lack of nourishment left him feeling woozy and sick, but he didn't know how else to make his point.

He hoped the lack of desire to communicate or take care of himself would get under Hannibal's skin. Despite the recent events, some part of Will still felt that the doctor cared for him, and if that were the case, his behavior should bother Hannibal. But Will's actions didn't lead to his freedom. Instead, Hannibal stopped trying to force him to talk. The doctor stopped spending his evenings in the guest bedroom with Will, and he only came in to bring Will a new plate of food to replace the old, untouched one.

Will wasn't sure how many days went by like that – probably half a week – but it felt like an eternity. He had been wrong about Hannibal's feelings for him, and the doctor was letting him suffer in silence. Without the occasional companionship from Hannibal, Will was left to nothing but his own thoughts.

His mind frequently wandered to his old life. The lecture hall. The crime scenes. His house in Wolf Trap. His dogs. Will's stomach ached at the thought of his dogs. At least Alana was taking care of them. He could live with that.

In worse moments – in moments where he fought his stress-induced hallucinations – he imagined Garret Jacob Hobbs gliding across the bedroom floor, pale and lifeless, bullet wounds gaping in his torso. Will tried to pull his gun but found it missing from his hip each time. The hallucination would stop shortly after, and Will always felt relieved that he hadn't had to kill the man again. He hated the way it had felt. He hated liking it so much.

He wondered if killing Hannibal would feel the same way. His mind often flitted to the hallucination he had had days earlier, but his stomach would seize in protest. He didn't

understand it. Hannibal was a killer. *A monster*. But the thought of killing him – of Hannibal ceasing to exist – was too much for Will. The pain in his chest confused him, and he always ended up chasing the thought from his mind.

Will didn't have much to do but lie in bed and think. His stomach growled constantly but he tried to ignore it. He wanted Hannibal to care. He wanted him to be upset. But he wasn't. It didn't matter how many times Will refused to eat or talk to Hannibal, the doctor would simply go about his business as though nothing had changed. Will grew more and more upset, but he couldn't do anything about it. And after several days, when his stomach started to seize with intense hunger pangs, he began to regret his decision to give Hannibal the cold shoulder.

Hannibal stood at the kitchen sink, washing dishes from his dinner alone. Will hadn't spoken to him in four days. It was clear that the empath was attempting to irritate Hannibal, and the latter refused to give him that satisfaction. Hannibal was, indeed, bothered by the behavior, but he wouldn't let it show. He had barely visited Will in the past few days, and he had completely stopped trying to engage Will in conversation. If Hannibal were being honest with himself, it hurt to leave Will alone that way, but he had no other choice. He knew Will would break first, especially when he grew too hungry or lonely to keep up his behavior.

But Hannibal had sneaked looks at Will when he'd switched out dinner plates. The wasted food didn't bother him as much as the sight of Will lying in bed, clearly depressed and growing thinner. Hannibal considered tying Will to a chair and force-feeding him, but he had resolved to give the stubborn man a couple more days to come around before he took control again.

As Hannibal washed the last of the dishes, he heard a distant voice.

"Hannibal," Will called.

Hannibal turned off the faucet. As he dried his hands on a towel, the corners of his mouth twitched upwards. He tossed the towel on the counter and headed for the stairs.

When Hannibal entered the room, Will looked up from his seat on the edge of the bed. Hannibal stood just inside the door, hands clasped in front of him. He didn't want to make any presumptions, so he waited for Will to speak first.

"Hi." Will said after a handful of seconds passed. His eyebrows were raised slightly and his eyes sparkled in the light from the bedside lamp.

Hannibal smiled. "Hello."

Will dropped his gaze and fidgeted with the edge of rumpled bed covers beside him.

"Do you need something?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head.

Hannibal closed the bedroom door and then walked towards Will. He stopped a couple of feet in front of him. “Would you like to talk?”

“Sure.”

Hannibal took the edge of the comforter from Will and tossed it aside. Then he sat down beside him. He glanced at the bedside table and took note of the empty plate. He let a smile take over his features.

“You ate dinner.”

“I was pretty hungry.”

“I’m glad you ate.”

“When will you trust me again?” Will asked abruptly. He looked up but didn’t meet Hannibal’s eyes.

Hannibal contained his sigh. “Will, we—”

“Don’t say we’ve been over this. We haven’t. Not entirely.”

“Tell me what you mean.”

“I mean, you said you would let me go when you could trust me. Well, when will that be? How will you trust me again?”

“It will be a gradual thing.”

“What does that mean?”

“You will not have complete freedom all at once. It will come in steps.”

“What’s the first step? When will that happen?”

“It will happen when I feel you are ready.”

“I *am* ready,” Will insisted. He met the doctor’s eyes. “Please, Hannibal.”

Hannibal rested a hand on Will’s shoulder, squeezing gently.

“I won’t run.”

“Will, you have told me that before. And then you ran anyway. Three different times.”

“I-I know.” Will squeezed his eyes closed and shook his head. “I was overwhelmed. I just needed to get away to think.”

Hannibal tilted his head, feeling skeptical. “Just to think?” he asked.

“Yes,” Will said quickly. Too quickly.

“Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not lying to you.” Will furrowed his brow and looked at Hannibal again. “I wasn’t running to Jack. I was just running...*away*.”

“Can you say with certainty that you would not have gone to Jack?”

Will opened his mouth but then closed it again. He averted his eyes and sighed. “No.”

“Thank you for the honesty.”

Will muttered something Hannibal couldn’t discern.

“I can’t hear you.”

Will’s Adam’s apple bobbed and then he whispered, “I wouldn’t now.”

“Why?”

Will sucked in a breath and exhaled slowly. His facial muscles twitched, betraying his discomfort, as he turned his head towards Hannibal, but he didn’t look at the doctor.

Hannibal assured himself that Will was lying to him again. The man had run not once, not twice, but three times. Two of those times after agreeing not to. Of course he would say he wouldn’t run to Jack. Hannibal couldn’t trust that.

But something in him did. Something in him felt a pull at Will’s discomfort. He was struggling with his desires. The empath had assured Hannibal he wouldn’t go to Jack, and a part of him – the majority part – believed Will. Hannibal tried to ignore the swelling of hope inside of him. Will didn’t say another word, but Hannibal knew that he was starting to come around after all.

Hannibal looked up from the chair in the corner of the guest bedroom when the bathroom door opened. Will entered the room, wearing only a pair of lightweight, navy-and-white striped pajama pants that rode low on his narrow waist. He glanced Hannibal’s way and the latter thought he detected a hint of a smile before the younger man looked away. Will’s hair was damp from his shower and the water-heavy locks brushed the nape of his neck. Hannibal made a mental note to offer a haircut in the near future.

“Did you have a nice shower?” Hannibal asked.

Will nodded and walked to the mahogany dresser. It had fit better with the aesthetic of the room when it had stood beside the bedroom door. But since Will’s chain wouldn’t allow him to reach that far, days earlier Hannibal had switched its place with a marble-top credenza next to the bathroom door. Then, Hannibal had retrieved Will’s clothing from the main bedroom and folded them neatly into the drawers.

Will opened the second drawer – shirts, Hannibal knew – and thumbed through them. Hannibal watched him closely. As Will pulled a light gray t-shirt from the drawer and unfolded it, the wiry muscles of his arms flexed and contracted. Hannibal took note of the bagginess of his pants and the way Will's ribs threatened to poke through his skin.

As Will pulled the shirt on over his head, Hannibal mused aloud, "You have grown thinner."

Will tugged the hem of his shirt down as he turned to face Hannibal. He met his eyes for a moment as he said, "It has been a little difficult to keep up my appetite."

"Because you are locked up?"

Will's focus wandered around the room and he nodded. "That, and..."

"And?"

"The headaches. The nightmares." He lowered his voice and added, "The hallucinations."

Hannibal refrained from frowning. "You did not tell me about those."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I wasn't pleased with you."

"And now?"

"Now." Will smiled at something across the room. The expression was awkward and less than genuine. "Now, I have been able to tolerate you."

"It seems that that is progress."

"It seems it is."

"How many hallucinations have you had?"

"I haven't counted."

"It would be wise to lower your stress level."

Will looked at him through his lashes. His eyes were narrowed. "You do realize the cause of my stress at the moment."

"I do."

"Then it is up to you to lower my stress level, Doctor Lecter."

"It would also help you feel better if you ate a little more."

Will looked away and made a humming noise deep in his throat. He walked to the edge of the bed and sat down.

“Do you not agree?” Hannibal stood up from the chair and walked to the bed, sitting down gently beside Will.

“You’re the doctor.”

“Despite what you may believe, I do want what’s best for you.”

Will lifted his eyebrows and nodded. He didn’t say a word or look at Hannibal.

“And I believe that getting you away from those crime scenes was a good thing for you.”

“You just replaced that stress with the stress of keeping me captive.”

“This is not permanent.”

“Neither was that, apparently.”

Hannibal placed his hand on Will’s shoulder. The younger man inclined his head towards the touch. Hannibal smiled.

“You are making progress,” Hannibal said. “Each time you are unrestrained and do not try to run, my trust in you increases.”

“Good,” Will said dully.

Hannibal slid his hand to the younger man’s back, Will’s spine meeting his palm.

“Will you consider giving me another chance?” Will asked after a few moments.

“Another chance at freedom?”

Will turned his head to look at Hannibal. “Yes,” he whispered.

Hannibal stared into Will’s eyes, yellow flecks swimming in an ocean of blue. He brought his hand up and snaked his fingers into Will’s hair, the unruly locks momentarily tamed by dampness. He kept his eyes on Will’s, surprised the empath had held his gaze for so long. He curled his fingers into Will’s hair and glanced at the younger man’s lips. Will wetted them, and whether it was intentional or habitual, Hannibal wasn’t sure. He seized the opportunity and leaned close.

When Will didn’t pull away, Hannibal brushed his lips against the other man’s. Will sucked in a sharp breath through his nose, but he didn’t move. His breath was ragged and hot as he exhaled. Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s, keeping the kiss gentle despite the desire burning low in his stomach. Will returned the gesture, pressing back in a firm kiss. He opened his mouth, and Hannibal took Will’s lower lip between his teeth. Will let out a quiet moan as Hannibal nipped at the sensitive skin. He let Will’s lip go and kissed him again, then he brushed his lips across Will’s jawline, the man’s stubble feeling rough and scratchy against

Hannibal's lips. Hannibal felt Will's hands on his sides and he trailed kisses down Will's neck. Will shrugged his shoulder and shied away. Hannibal thought he was being playful until the pressure at his sides increased and he realized Will was trying to push him away. Hannibal pulled back just enough to look at Will who wouldn't meet his eyes. Hannibal hooked a finger beneath Will's chin and pulled it up.

"Look at me."

Will complied, lifting his eyes to meet Hannibal's.

Hannibal offered a gentle smile. "I will think about it."

Will's brow furrowed.

"Another chance at freedom," Hannibal clarified. Will's expression softened and Hannibal thought he detected a hint of a smile.

Will lay in bed, staring up at the ceiling. He had awoken nearly an hour earlier, just before dawn, after a restless night of sleep. His mind wouldn't cease its racing as it continued to play over and over the events of the previous night.

Hannibal had kissed him. Will had let him. He didn't know why. He was supposed to be angry with Hannibal. He was supposed to be repulsed by him. By the things he did. He was supposed to hate him. But he couldn't. And deep down, he knew he didn't want to. But he wasn't ready to be intimate with him again – not yet – so he had put a stop to the kiss.

He expected Hannibal to be upset by that. To want to punish him for it. But he hadn't. In fact, the doctor had seemed pleased that Will had shown any kind of affection towards him at all. And when Hannibal had locked Will up and left the room for the night, Will sat on the edge of the bed for a half hour, arguing with himself about whether or not to call Hannibal back in.

But he hadn't. Despite the yearning in his gut, he told himself it was smarter to let Hannibal go for now. He wasn't sure whether or not he believed it. He had fallen asleep with a headache and had tossed and turned all night, replaying the kiss. Replaying the way Hannibal's fingers felt in his hair, clenching and tugging and spreading goosebumps across his skin. The way Hannibal's lean, solid core had felt beneath his hands. The way his lip tingled between Hannibal's nipping teeth. It was like the doctor couldn't get enough of Will's taste. But he had always been that way – kissing and biting and nipping at Will's skin – so Will wasn't sure why it sat so strangely with him now.

Will was pulled from his reverie when there was a knock at the bedroom door.

"Come in," Will said.

The door opened and Hannibal glided in. Will's stomach tightened but not from fear or disgust like before. Will sat up in the middle of the bed as Hannibal approached.

"How are you this morning?" Hannibal said, his voice warm and soothing.

“Good,” Will sputtered before he could even think. *Good? What about this is good exactly?* But he couldn’t think of a reason why he wasn’t good at the moment.

Hannibal offered a small smile as he lowered himself to the foot of the bed. He patted the comforter beside him. “Come here.”

Will shuffled to the foot of the bed and sat cross-legged beside Hannibal. The doctor reached over and grasped Will’s right foot. Will unfolded and let the doctor manipulate him at will. Hannibal fished in his pocket and pulled out the key. Then he unlocked Will’s ankle cuff and slid it off.

Will furrowed his brow. There was only one scenario for which Hannibal had ever let him out of the cuff. “Do I need another shower?”

Hannibal smiled. “No. Come have breakfast with me,” he said, his voice gentle and even.

“What?”

“I would like for you to join me for breakfast.”

Will looked around the room. He wasn’t sure what he was looking for – possibly something, anything, that could help him make sense of the situation. Finding nothing, he squeezed his eyes closed and whispered, “Am I hallucinating?”

He felt Hannibal’s hands on his shoulders and then the doctor calmly said, “You are not hallucinating. I told you I would consider giving you another chance. I have decided.”

Will opened his eyes. “You have actually decided to give me another chance?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said. Then, his tone changed and he sounded playful. “Why, should I not?”

“No. No, you should.” Will looked at him. “I am just surprised.”

Hannibal smiled. “Are you hungry?”

Will took note of the pains in his belly and nodded. “Yes.”

“Okay.” Hannibal stood up and held out a hand. “Let’s go downstairs.”

Will looked at Hannibal’s hand, outstretched and waiting. Will couldn’t help but feel like it was a trap of some sort. But what could Hannibal possibly be trapping him with at the moment? Will shook the paranoia from his mind and took Hannibal’s hand.

“Shouldn’t I get dressed?” Will asked, eyeing Hannibal in his waistcoat and trousers.

“No need. I would like for you to be comfortable.”

Will complied and the doctor led him out of the bedroom. Will looked around the hallway as though seeing it for the first time. The dark hardwood floor covered with an ornate area rug.

The tasteful antique décor on the walls. The crystal chandelier suspended from the ceiling. *God, did he have one of those in every room?*

He heard a throaty chuckle and turned at the sound. Hannibal stood beside him, staring with a small, clearly amused, grin on his face.

Will ducked his head, feeling heat in his cheeks. Hannibal said nothing about it and Will was glad. The doctor let go of his hand and gestured towards the staircase. Will looked at the stairs and then back at Hannibal.

Despite what Hannibal had said in the bedroom, Will didn't know what to believe. He didn't know what he was allowed to do anymore. He refrained from sighing, feeling like a guest – and a prisoner – in one of the only places that used to make him feel at home.

“Go on,” Hannibal encouraged. “You have my permission.”

Will turned towards the stairs and descended, glancing over his shoulder at Hannibal, who followed a few steps behind. When Will reached the bottom, he stopped and waited for Hannibal.

When the doctor joined him, he put a gentle hand to Will's back and said, “Breakfast is almost ready. Let's go to the dining room.”

Hannibal had Will lead the way again, the two of them walking to the dining room together. Hannibal stood at the head of the table, arms hanging relaxed at his sides. Will wandered around the table. He looked at the fireplace that hadn't been lit, noticing the details carved into the wood. He glanced up at the ceiling, taking note of the dangling chandelier, and he smirked. He continued around the table, dragging his fingers along the edge of the polished wood.

“I regret the way things have had to be lately.”

Will looked up at the doctor. When Hannibal's gaze grew too intense – as it so often did – Will resumed his observation of the room.

“I hope today will be the start of a new chapter.”

Will stopped at the end of the table opposite Hannibal. He rested both hands on the back of the chair. His stomach turned somersaults. The mixture of hunger and nerves was starting to make him feel nauseated. He swallowed thickly and then tried to keep his voice as calm as possible as he asked, “So, is *this* permanent?” He glanced at Hannibal.

“This is a trial.”

“A trial?”

“Yes. Today, we will see how well you do. If you follow my rules, we will try again tomorrow.”

Will nodded. “Okay.”

“If you do not follow my rules—”

“We won’t have to worry about that,” Will interrupted.

Hannibal was quiet for a few moments, staring back at Will who resisted the urge to squirm where he stood. Then the doctor said, “That would be wise.” His voice was low and the words were coated in his accent, giving them an ominous tone.

Will felt a chill despite the comfortable warmth of the room.

“With that in mind, I believe we should go over the rules so that you know what to avoid.”

“Okay.”

Will fidgeted with the edge of the chair, dragging a fingernail across it. His stomach continued to churn its discomfort.

“Will,” Hannibal said.

Will looked up and saw that the doctor’s focus was on Will’s hands. Will stopped scratching the wood and dropped his arms to his sides.

“Come sit, please,” Hannibal added.

Will walked to the chair closest to the fireplace and pulled it out enough to sit down. Hannibal took a seat in the chair at the head of the table.

“So, what’s rule number one?” Will asked, leaning forward and resting his arms on the table.

“You are not to leave the house.”

Will raised his eyebrows and nodded. “I assumed as much.”

“You do not contact anybody. Or try to.”

“Again...”

“You are to do as I tell you.”

Will sighed but nodded. He didn’t like that sound of that but wasn’t sure what he could do about it.

“You may remain free of your restraints so long as I am here and awake.”

“So, tonight...” Will felt the frown overtake his expression.

“Yes,” Hannibal said gently. “Tonight, you will be back in the guest bedroom.”

“On the chain.”

“On the chain.”

Will leaned back in his chair and sighed.

“Will.”

“No, I know. It’s a trial. I didn’t expect anything different.” He exhaled a sound that was somewhere between a snort and a laugh. “Hell, I didn’t expect to be downstairs today. So this is good.”

“Yes. I believe so too.”

Will looked at Hannibal whose eyes searched Will’s face. The doctor looked curious.

“Why are you looking at me that way?”

“I am simply anticipating how this weekend will go.”

“Do you expect it to go well?”

“I do.”

Will smiled and looked away, staring into the neatly arranged floral centerpiece. “So do I.”

“Good.”

A few minutes later, the oven timer sounded from the next room. Hannibal told Will to remain seated and then the doctor disappeared into the kitchen. Will was tired of sitting, tired of waiting, tired of being confined to one space. But Hannibal had told him to stay put. He wasn’t sure if standing up would be a violation of Hannibal’s rules, but he didn’t want to risk it. Not to mention that the pangs in his stomach were starting to make him feel sick, so he had no desire to actually get to his feet.

Hannibal returned moments later, carrying two plates. He walked around the table and set one down in front of Will and then glided to the other side of the table and took a seat opposite of Will. Hannibal rattled off the name of the dish – something in French – and Will looked down at his plate. It looked like some kind of meat cut into neat slices and arranged in an omelet. Will’s belly grumbled, deeply and loudly.

He looked up at Hannibal whose eyes were on his own plate. He said nothing, but Will thought he saw the corners of the doctor’s mouth twitch upward.

“This looks great,” Will said, trying to ignore his embarrassment.

“Eat up, Will.”

Will stabbed a piece of meat with his fork and popped it into his mouth. It was tender and spicy and his whole mouth filled with saliva around it. He poked at the egg part of the fancy omelet and took a taste. It was like no omelet he had ever eaten before, full of Hannibal’s home-grown herbs. He took bite after bite, popping them into his mouth one after another, barely allowing himself enough time to chew and swallow.

He was more than halfway finished with his breakfast when he realized he hadn't said a word since he had begun eating. He glanced up at Hannibal who took a bite and then looked at him. Will looked at the doctor's plate which was still nearly full, and then he looked down at his own, most of the omelet already devoured. He returned his gaze to the now-smiling Hannibal and Will felt his ears begin to burn.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what, dear Will?"

"I am wolfing my food."

Hannibal's smile grew as he watched Will with an expression the latter could only read as enamored. Will averted his gaze, staring down at his plate.

"I am glad you are eating," Hannibal said. "Do not stop on my account."

Will glanced up again in time to see Hannibal return his attention to his own breakfast. Will watched him eat a few bites, taking his time to cut an appropriately-sized piece and then put it in his mouth. He chewed slowly, no doubt savoring the sumptuous taste. Will continued on his own breakfast, keeping an eye on Hannibal's pace and working to match it.

Despite his efforts to slow down, Will finished first, his stomach protesting with a painful fullness. He laid his cutlery down and sat back in his chair. He put a hand to his belly which had grown hard with overindulgence. He was glad Hannibal had convinced him earlier not to change out of his pajama pants.

"Did you get enough to eat?" Hannibal asked. The doctor was on his last few bites, taking his time to finish.

"I did, thank you."

"Are you sure? I can make you another one if you like. Or something else."

"No, no. That was plenty. More than enough, actually."

Hannibal smiled.

"It was delicious. I am very stuffed."

"Good."

"I have—" Will stopped himself, pressing his lips firmly together.

Hannibal looked up, his eyebrows lifted in question. "You have what?"

"I—Nothing. Nevermind."

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, looking at Will through his lashes. That patented Hannibal expression that always looked equal parts playful and admonishing. Will looked away.

“Will, what did you want to say?”

“Nothing,” Will mumbled.

“Did you not enjoy your breakfast?”

“No! No, it was delicious.”

“Tell me what’s on your mind.”

Will sighed, touching the end of his fork, fidgeting. The metal clanked sharply against the plate.

“Please,” Hannibal prodded.

Will stopped fidgeting and rested his hand beside his empty plate. “I was just going to say that I have...missed this.”

Hannibal said nothing and Will felt the effects of indigestion burning up to the back of his throat. His already aching stomach churned with nerves. He glanced at Hannibal.

The doctor had knife and fork in hand, resting above his plate. He watched Will with eyes that looked softer than normal. Warm, even. The way Hannibal had looked at him during tender moments in bed or while spending a lazy Sunday together on the sofa. Will had missed that as well.

“I have also missed our meals together, Will.”

Will thought back to their last meal together. The night he had discovered Hannibal’s true identity. He shook that memory from his mind and instead tried to find a memory of their last meal together where he *hadn’t* known that his boyfriend was a serial killer. His mind flitted to the night Alana had joined the two of them for dinner. That meal had been more relaxed, more carefree, and despite having had to work to keep his relationship with Hannibal a secret, Will had felt much more at ease.

“Tandoori liver in smoked paprika and marmalade sauce.”

“Excuse me?”

Will looked up from his reverie to see the doctor staring at him with a slight smirk and furrowed brow. Will laughed nervously, a noise that sounded more like a puff of air than a laugh.

“Is that something you would like?”

Will shook his head. “I was just thinking.”

“About Tandoori liver.”

Will closed his eyes, trying to keep the growing warmth in his cheeks from burning entirely. His throat felt dry and as he spoke, he nearly choked on his words. “It was the last meal we had before—”

“Right,” Hannibal said gently.

“Yeah.”

“Perhaps having it again would allow your mind to return to a similar place.”

“You want to fool my mind into thinking it’s happy by feeding me foods I enjoyed when it was?” Will heard his own words and wrinkled his nose in confusion.

Hannibal hadn’t seemed to notice the circuitous rambling. But his frown was evident as he spoke. “I would simply like for you to be happy again.”

“With food therapy.”

“A little unorthodox, I admit. But that does not mean it wouldn’t help.”

Will allowed a small smile to play on his lips. “You are the therapist, Doctor Lecter. If you think it would help me be happier, I will not say no.”

“It is worth a shot.”

Will agreed that the therapy style was a little strange, but he was willing to try. He wanted to be happy again. He wanted things to return to the way they had once been. He wanted to spend time with Hannibal and not think about the fact that the man was a serial killer. He didn’t want to replay crime scenes in his mind and then feel that stab of pain in his stomach as he realized that the murder had been committed by someone he loved. His mind wandered back to the most recent crime scene. The human bowling ball. Will tried to shake the thought from his mind. He didn’t want to recall such a gruesome scene when he was feeling the best he had in days, but he couldn’t stop the flood of images. Something continued to pull him deeper and deeper into the memory.

The naked and bloated and discolored man lying in the bowling alley. His throat slit, a stream of blood running down the gutter. His body broken and manipulated in inhuman ways. His abdomen gaping. His liver missing. His...

“His liver missing,” Will mumbled. His stomach seized and he thought he would be sick. He put a hand to his belly and leaned forward, bracing himself against the edge of the table with his other hand.

“Will?”

Will closed his eyes and his mind raced, images of the Chesapeake Ripper’s victims flashing behind his eyelids. All of them sadistically killed. All of them arranged in gruesome ostentation. *All of them missing a piece.*

“Oh, God,” Will groaned. He heard the clank of cutlery on dishware and then the creak of a chair sliding across the wooden floor. A moment later he felt a hand on his back. His eyes flew open and he jumped, nearly falling out of his chair.

Hannibal wrapped an arm around him, the doctor’s fingers practically digging into Will’s ribcage. “Will?”

“No.”

“Will, what’s wrong?”

“Please,” Will whispered. He grabbed Hannibal’s hand and removed it from his side. Then Will slid out of the chair, bracing himself against the table as he moved away from the doctor.

“Will, please talk to me. Tell me what’s happening.”

Will shook his head. He didn’t want to see Hannibal’s dining room. He didn’t want to see Hannibal. He squeezed his eyes closed but more images flooded in. He opened them again, choosing the lesser of the two evils.

Hannibal was closer. Will hadn’t seen him move, but he was definitely closer. There were only a few feet between them. Will pushed off the table and backed towards the doorway.

“Will.”

“You...” Will shook his head.

“Will, tell me what’s on your mind.”

Will tried to growl. He tried to hiss his words, but they came out weak and quiet. “You are eating them.”

Hannibal said nothing and Will glanced towards him, refusing to meet his eyes. Hannibal’s posture changed. He straightened up, his shoulders rolling back. He didn’t look surprised or embarrassed. He didn’t look affected at all. Will risked a glance at his face. The doctor’s expression was even and calm. He didn’t look angry or predatory as Will had thought he might.

“I wondered when you would figure it out.”

Will’s mouth fell open as he looked away. A part of him hoped that Hannibal would deny it. That he would assure Will he was not a cannibal, of all things. Despite having known better – despite too many things adding up – Will couldn’t prevent the stabbing pain in his chest from Hannibal’s admission. Or, at least, as close to an admission as he would get.

“I...” Will’s lips continued to move but he couldn’t make another sound. He didn’t know what to say, and even if he had, he wasn’t sure he could form the words. He took another step back, reaching out to the door frame for support. Then, he turned around and left the room.

“Will.”

“No.”

“Will, don’t walk away.”

Will shook his head. He didn’t know where he was going. He wanted to leave. He *needed* to leave. He entered the entry hallway and rushed to the front door.

A Firm No

Chapter Summary

Will reacts to finding out that Hannibal is a cannibal.

“Will,” Hannibal barked from behind him.

Will stopped with his hand on the doorknob.

“We had a deal,” Hannibal said. His voice deep. His tone threatening.

“That was before I knew you were a...a *cannibal*.”

“The deal remains, Will.”

Will gripped the doorknob until his knuckles turned white. He hadn’t glanced over his shoulder at the doctor, but he could tell by his voice that he was not directly behind him. He was across the hall. Several feet away. If Will could just open the door and slip through...

Will loosened his grip on the doorknob, his hand aching from the pressure. A moment later, he let go and dropped his hand to his side.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said.

Will leaned against the door, resting his forehead against the thick wood.

“I will let you be,” Hannibal said. “Please, do not leave.”

Will couldn’t speak. His body felt tired and heavy. He couldn’t move. He wanted to droop to the floor. He wanted to curl up in a ball. He wanted to cry. But he didn’t. Instead, he sucked in a deep breath and pushed off the door. When he turned around, Hannibal was gone.

Will wandered back through the entryway and veered off the opposite direction of the dining room. He went into Hannibal’s study and pushed the door up, leaving it ajar.

A cannibal.

Will was less surprised at that fact than at the fact that he had not seen it. All of the crime scenes he had been to. All of the murderers he could so easily empathize with. He had been so accurate with his account of the Chesapeake Ripper, but he had been so blind as well. He wished he could be blind now. He assumed that had been his idea all along, subconscious as it may have been. He had not seen Hannibal because he had not wanted to. He hadn’t wanted to believe that his therapist, his friend, his boyfriend was a killer. And a cannibal. He had

avoided that knowledge as best he could until it had all but reared up and smacked him across the face.

Ignorance is bliss, indeed, he thought.

Will wandered around Hannibal's study. He tapped a couple of ivory keys on Hannibal's piano. The sound rang out, lingering in his ears. He moseyed to Hannibal's desk, taking note of the drawing spread out on the polished wood surface. Will hadn't seen it before. He reached over and clicked on the desk lamp, illuminating the drawing. Will bent at the waist, leaning close to look at it. The drawing looked like a rendition of a Renaissance painting. One which Hannibal had told him about but the name of which had escaped Will. The figure in the center was male and lying down, naked, obscured only slightly by a length of silken cloth draped over his genitals. Will furrowed his brow as he looked at the charcoal lines that made up the man's face. He looked familiar. He looked very familiar.

He looks like me.

Will straightened up but continued to stare down at the figure. The features were similar. Same eye shape, same jawline. But his face was clean-shaven. His hair, however, was a dead ringer. Will slid a hand into his hair as he stared down at the unruly curls that matched his perfectly. The body was slightly different, however. Thicker, fuller, a little more muscular. The drawing didn't look overly muscular and wasn't very toned, but the chest and abdomen were more filled out, more defined, than Will's. The difference was noticeable. Will put a hand to his stomach. It was still full and hard from breakfast, but it was flat. Lean. Probably scrawny, if Will were being honest with himself.

Feeling suddenly self-conscious, Will folded his arms across his chest and wandered away from the desk. He found himself at the window, staring out into the side yard. Snow was flurrying and the ground was a distinct mixture of brown and white. It was the same window he had escaped through before. He found the lock and put his hand over it. He examined the edges of the window frame with his eyes, a little surprised when he found that it hadn't been nailed shut. Although, the damage that would have done to the frame would not have sat well with Hannibal. Plus, crude nails jutting out from the wood would detract from the beautiful aesthetic of the architecture, and Hannibal would find that unacceptable.

With the window in the same condition as always, Will pondered his desire to run. He had wanted to get away from Hannibal, but had he wanted to leave the house entirely? He needed to think. Needed time to collect his thoughts. Despite having had countless hours of alone time in the guest bedroom, his mind was muddled. He needed fresh air. He needed nature. He needed his dogs.

He knew Hannibal wouldn't allow him to go to them, but he wondered if Hannibal would bring them – or at least one – to the house. The last Will had heard, Alana had taken them all in. Will frowned, wondering how much of a chore it would be for Hannibal to pry one away from her.

Will let go of the window lock and turned around. When he caught sight of Hannibal in the doorway, his heart leapt into his throat.

“I apologize, Will,” the doctor said. “I did not mean to startle you.”

The door hung wide – Will hadn’t even heard it open all the way – and Hannibal was leaned against the doorframe, his hands tucked in the pockets of his trousers.

“Do you still want to run?” Hannibal asked.

Will opened his mouth. He glanced over his shoulder at the window, realizing that Hannibal must have been watching him peer out the same window from which he had escaped before. His stomach tightened.

“No,” Will said, putting too much force behind the word. “I-I wasn’t trying to run. I was just look—”

“It’s okay,” Hannibal said, his voice gentle and calm. Then a smile spread across his face. “I believe you.”

Will sighed heavily, relief spreading throughout his chest.

“Have you calmed down?”

Will rubbed his hands over his face, then he dropped them to his sides. “Yeah. I was just worried you’d think I was trying to escape again.”

“I mean from earlier. Have you calmed down after your realization?”

“Oh.” Will’s gaze fell to the rug between them. “Yes.”

“Good.”

“Not that I am okay with it.”

“No. I suppose you wouldn’t be.”

“How can *you* be?”

“I—”

“*Nevermind*,” Will interrupted, putting a hand up, palm out. “I don’t want to know.”

“In time,” Hannibal said. He pushed off the doorframe and stepped into the room. He walked to a cabinet against the wall near the desk and opened it.

Will turned to watch, curious.

Hannibal removed a wine glass and two glasses, setting them all down on a side table. He opened the bottle and filled both glasses with the crimson liquid.

“Do you have wine in every room?” Will asked.

“Nearly,” Hannibal answered with a smile. “One never knows when or where one may need to entertain company.”

“Is that what you are doing now?”

“Entertaining company?”

“Yes.”

“No. I am having a drink with my friend.”

Will thought he heard a catch in Hannibal’s voice before the final word.

“Friend,” Will repeated.

Hannibal looked at him. Will stared back.

“Is that word not appropriate for you and I in your mind?”

Will thought about it. Was he Hannibal’s friend? He had been, at one time. He had been a lot more than that, in fact. But the way things had been lately, Will had felt more like they were enemies than friends. And he wondered, if Hannibal still felt the same way he always had, why he hadn’t used the term “boyfriend” instead. Will assumed the doctor had settled for a compromise, not wanting to admit that their intimacy had completely dissipated over the past several days. In all honesty, however, Will wasn’t sure that it had. But he shook the thought from his mind.

“I don’t know what’s appropriate for us anymore,” he said. The honesty made his chest hurt.

The doctor approached and Will let his gaze wander away. In his peripheral vision, he saw Hannibal hold out a glass of wine.

“For you,” he said when Will didn’t take it.

Will looked at the wine glass, wondering if Hannibal had put something in it. *Why would he do that?* If he wanted to subdue Will, he could do it easily enough without the help of drugs. He had done it numerous times already. Casting his paranoia aside, Will took the glass.

As he stared down into the dark red liquid, he asked, “Isn’t it a little early for wine?”

“Since when have you and I been conventional?”

Will smirked and then nodded. He lifted the glass to his lips and took a sip.

Hannibal allowed Will to remain free of restraints for the remainder of the day. After breakfast, the two of them had had a glass of wine and talked, but then Hannibal let Will enjoy his freedom. The younger man had wandered around the house by himself. Hannibal wasn’t sure what he was doing – other than changing his clothes at some point – but he

seemed in better spirits than he had been in the last couple of weeks, and Hannibal was pleased with that.

He was even more pleased with the fact that Will hadn't run. Despite having told Will he thought the day would go well, he hadn't been entirely sure that Will would comply with the rules. Especially once the empath had discovered Hannibal's other secret. That realization had not been planned by Hannibal, and the suddenness of it had him worried that Will would try to escape again, and then they would be right back where they had started.

But Will hadn't run. He had tried to leave at first. Hannibal had nearly moved to pry Will from the front door, but he told himself to give the man a chance. He allowed Will to pry himself away instead, and it had worked out in Hannibal's favor.

Hannibal had called Will to lunch a few hours later. They sat across from one another again at the dining room table. Afterwards, they went to the study and sat apart, enjoying the quiet company. When Hannibal had gone to the kitchen to begin fixing dinner, Will had joined him. Hannibal considered asking Will to help but thought it might be too soon to give the man a knife with which to cut onions. So instead, Hannibal cooked alone and Will alternated reading from the chair in the corner and lingering on the opposite side of the counter to watch Hannibal work.

When the meal was finished cooking, they ate and drank together, emptying two bottles of wine. At the end of dinner, Hannibal took note of Will's plate. It was mostly empty, save for the few slices of meat he had left behind.

"Come here," Hannibal said in the study after dinner. He was seated on the chaise lounge and patted the cushion beside him.

Will staggered to him, tripping over the edge of the rug as he approached. He caught his balance and reached the lounge, sitting down heavily.

"I assume you would prefer a vegetarian lifestyle from now on," Hannibal said.

"Mm." Will slumped back against the lounge. "Yes. You may be a cannibal but I am not."

Hannibal cocked his head to the side. "Technically, you are."

"Well, I didn't know it," Will said, his words slurring together. "And I don't want to be. No more meat for me."

"What if I promise to feed you only those things of which you would approve?"

"No more meat for me," Will repeated. He clasped his hands over his belly and closed his eyes.

Hannibal turned towards him. He reached a hand over and slowly slipped his fingers into Will's hair. The younger man let out a quiet moan but didn't move or open his eyes.

"You are drunk," Hannibal said.

“I am.”

“How do you feel?”

“Stuffed.”

Hannibal smiled. “I would imagine so. You consumed more than usual today.”

Will nodded. “Mm-hmm.”

“Are you ready for bed?”

“No.”

“You look sleepy.”

“Just resting my eyes.”

“Okay.”

Hannibal twirled Will’s curls around his fingers. He sat quietly, watching the other man who was quiet for several minutes. The only sound was the occasional moan deep in his throat that Hannibal could only assume was an effect of his hair being played with.

“Do you think I’m too skinny?” Will asked after several minutes.

Hannibal furrowed his brow. He was not sure where the question had come from, but he knew his answer. “Yes.”

Will opened his eyes and rolled his head to the side to look at Hannibal. The doctor brushed a lock of hair from the younger man’s forehead.

“Why do you ask?” Hannibal said.

“I saw your drawing.”

“My drawing,” Hannibal repeated, trying to find the connection.

“It is me, isn’t it?”

Hannibal smiled. He hadn’t meant for Will to see his most recent drawing. He had started it a few days earlier when Will had stopped speaking to him. Hannibal missed their time together and had found that drawing Will helped with his own mood.

“Yes,” Hannibal answered.

“I am...not so skinny in it.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Will, you are not generally as thin as you are right now.”

“I know. But I am never as thick as you have drawn me either.”

“I would hardly say that I have drawn you *thick*.”

“Thicker, I mean. Filled out. Muscular.”

“True.”

“Is that how you would prefer me, then? Is that why you drew me that way?”

He brushed the back of his hand against Will’s cheek. “No, dear Will. I prefer you healthy, no matter your size.”

“Then, why the drawing?”

“It is truer to the original painting.”

“Oh. That’s the only reason?”

“Yes.”

“Okay,” Will said. He closed his eyes.

Hannibal had expected more questions from the inebriated man. He was pleased not to have to answer them, however. He leaned closer to Will, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

Then, he whispered, “Let’s get you to bed.”

Will let out a quiet moan. Hannibal wasn’t sure if it was in assent or protest.

“I have grown rather sleepy myself,” Hannibal said. “Let’s go upstairs.”

Will sighed and opened his eyes. “I’m comfortable.”

“You will not be in the morning when you awaken with a very sore neck.”

Will frowned. “No, probably not.”

Hannibal smiled and got to his feet. He held his hand out to Will. “Come on, love.”

Will rubbed his hands over his face and then sat forward. He took Hannibal’s hand and got to his feet, wobbling a little. Hannibal wrapped an arm around Will’s waist to steady him. Then, he led him out of the study and up the stairs. They walked to the guest bedroom where Hannibal ushered Will to the bed.

“I need to brush my teeth,” Will slurred.

“Okay.” Hannibal started to slide his arm around the man again, but Will pushed his hand away.

“I can do it. I can walk.”

Hannibal smiled gently. Then, Will clambered to his feet and stumbled to the bathroom. He left the door open as he used the toilet. It flushed a few seconds later and then Hannibal heard the faucet turn on. He sat down on the end of the bed and waited.

Will came back out a couple minutes later. He walked to the dresser and pulled a drawer open. He rummaged inside, pulling out a t-shirt and a pair of pajama pants. He walked to the bed and set them down.

“I haven’t been this drunk in a long time,” Will said. He swayed on his feet as he unbuttoned his flannel shirt.

“You should drink some water,” Hannibal suggested.

“Yeah,” Will said. He finished with the buttons and removed the shirt, letting it drop to the floor. Then, he unfastened his jeans, wriggling out of them until they were in a heap next to his shirt.

“I will get you a glass,” Hannibal said. He got to his feet and went to the bathroom. He would have preferred to stay and watch his lover in his underwear, but he couldn’t do anything about it. He couldn’t go to Will and put his hands on him. He couldn’t glide his hands along the smaller man’s chest and stomach, teasingly hooking his fingers in Will’s waistband until they were both finished playing. Despite the kiss of the previous night, he hadn’t fooled himself into thinking that Will would want that again. In fact, Will had been the one to stop the kiss in the first place. And even if Will had changed his mind – even if Will did want it – he was too drunk to communicate that. Hannibal wouldn’t know if Will were only saying it because he was drunk or because he really wanted to be with Hannibal. That’s not something Hannibal would risk. He could be patient. He was good at that.

Hannibal pulled Will’s toothbrush from the glass and set it on the edge of the sink. He filled the glass with cold water and returned to the bedroom.

Will was seated on the edge of the bed. He had pulled on the pajama pants but was still shirtless.

“Drink up,” Hannibal said, holding out the water glass.

“Thanks.” Will took the glass and drank. He emptied half of it before he set it down on the end table.

“Are you ready for bed?”

Will nodded.

Hannibal retrieved the ankle cuff from the foot of the bed and walked back around to the side. Will frowned when he saw the cuff.

“Is that necessary?” Will asked. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“It was part of our deal, remember?”

Will sighed but nodded. He kicked his feet up on the bed and lay down. Hannibal attached the cuff and then draped the covers over Will. He took the unused shirt and folded it, returning it to the drawer. Then he picked up Will’s discarded clothing and dropped them in the hamper he had brought in a few days earlier.

“Night, Hannibal,” Will slurred quietly.

Hannibal smiled. “Goodnight, Will.” He left the room, pulling the door closed behind him. As he walked to the master bedroom, he couldn’t help but smile, thinking about how well the day had gone.

Will awoke to a strange sensation. There was pressure around his foot and it was being moved without his permission. Will shifted, rolling onto his side. Light streamed in through the windows, the blinds still up and the drapes parted. Will groaned and rolled onto his back, throwing an arm over his eyes

“Good morning,” Hannibal said.

“What are you doing?” Will grumbled. Not only had he gone to sleep drunk Saturday night but the following night as well. Both evenings of the trial weekend had commenced with a small celebration. As his head pounded, Will knew he was paying for it now.

“It is late and I have to leave for work.”

Will dropped his arm to the bed and furrowed his brow. “Okay. But why are you waking me up?”

“I apologize, Will. I attempted to do it without waking you. I wanted to take the chain off before I left for work so you could roam about the house at your leisure.”

“Oh.”

“I tried to wait for you to wake up on your own, but it is late now, and I really must leave.”

“I see.” Will opened his eyes, keeping them narrow to block out as much sunlight as possible. “So, wait, you are letting me out while you are gone?”

“Yes,” Hannibal answered.

Will watched him walk to the windows. He pulled a string on each, letting the blinds drop, and then he closed the drapes.

“I thought I was only allowed off the chain while you were at home and awake. Wasn’t that rule number four?”

Hannibal smiled. "It was. However, you did so well during your trial period, that I want to reward you."

"By setting me free?"

"By removing the chain. Rules one, two, and three still apply."

"Okay. But you will not be here to stop me if I should run."

"Do you plan to run?"

"No."

"Good."

Will frowned, confused. "So you just suddenly trust me now?"

"Will, I want to trust you. More than you know. I am going to try."

"I have a feeling breaking that trust would be less than beneficial to my health."

"Not your health, Will. But you would never earn that trust back. Nor would you have a chance."

Will furrowed his brow at the last part. He was about to ask what it meant but decided he would rather not know. "We won't have to worry about that," he said after several moments.

"I am pleased to hear that." Hannibal pulled up the sleeve of his black suit jacket and checked his watch. "Unfortunately, if I do not leave now, I will be late for my first appointment."

"We can't have that."

"No. We cannot."

Will watched Hannibal, waiting for him to say goodbye and leave the room, but he didn't. He lingered near the bed, looking down at Will.

"What?" Will asked, feeling awkward and self-conscious. Despite the warmth of the room, he pulled the blanket over his chest.

"Is there anything you need before I go?"

Will shook his head but stopped abruptly as it began to pound. He groaned.

"Perhaps some painkillers?"

"Yes. But I can get them. You are going to be late."

"Okay." Hannibal smiled. "The bottle is in the medicine cabinet in the—"

"Master bathroom. Yes, I know. I've been in this house a lot."

“Right. My mistake.” Hannibal took a small step forward. “My last appointment is late afternoon, so I should not be home too late.” He slipped a hand into his pants pocket and pulled out a small flip phone.

“Vintage.”

Hannibal smiled. “My number is the only one you will be able to call. If you need anything.” He set the phone down on the bedside table.

Will turned his head and stared at the phone on the corner of the table. He wondered if that was true – if Hannibal’s number was really the only one he would be able to reach.

He was suddenly cast in shadow and he looked up to see Hannibal leaning down towards him. He tensed briefly but then relaxed as Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s forehead.

“Take the Tylenol, Will. And drink lots of water.”

“I will.”

“Breakfast is in the refrigerator. I left instructions for re-heating.”

“Thank you.”

Hannibal straightened up and tugged at the bottom of his waistcoat. “I will see you this evening. Goodbye, Will.”

“Goodbye, Doctor Lecter.” Will watched Hannibal leave the room and then he sat up in bed. He put a hand to his throbbing head. He needed to take a shower but he wasn’t sure he could do anything before he got those painkillers.

After pills and a couple glasses of water and a shower, Will had started to feel a little better. He got dressed, noticing the way his jeans hung low on his hips. One good tug and they would be around his ankles. He searched the dresser drawers for a belt. Finding none, he wandered down the hall to the master bedroom.

He turned the doorknob and pushed the door in, remaining on the hallway rug. He peered into the bedroom, seeing it for the first time in a couple of weeks. He chewed his bottom lip as he stepped across the threshold.

Everything was in the same place it had been before. The dressers against the walls. The closet doors slid closed. The drapes over the windows were open but the blinds were closed. The unlit fireplace. The room was tastefully decorated with dark and eclectic décor. And in the center of the room sat the bed he and Hannibal had shared countless times. The sight of it sent a jolt of nerves through his stomach. He walked to the nearest side of the bed – Hannibal’s side – and ran his fingers over the duvet that had been neatly tucked into place. The soft, plush fabric felt good against his fingers and he remembered all the times he and Hannibal had buried themselves beneath the comforter to engage in surprisingly sweet, and sometimes wild, foreplay.

Will pulled his hand away quickly, as though the touch itself were the only cause of the flood of memories. He walked away from the bed, setting his sights on the dresser. He pulled open the top drawer and found a brown belt. He snaked it through his belt loops. When he tightened it, he had to secure it in a hole nearly two inches away from the ragged one he had used before. He thought about his conversation with Hannibal a couple nights earlier. Hannibal had been right. He had certainly lost weight. Will shut the drawer and exited the room, pulling the door closed behind him.

He spent the majority of the day exploring the house, seeing it with new eyes and getting used to its nuances once again. He ran to the bathroom a couple different times to throw up, but once his stomach had settled in the late morning, he decided to try to eat.

He found the breakfast Hannibal had left for him, neatly stacked in air-tight glass containers in the refrigerator. There were several containers and Will wondered if Hannibal expected him to finish the contents. There was a note on the counter about re-heating, scrawled in the doctor's flourishing cursive. Will followed Hannibal's instructions to the letter but only re-heated a small portion of the food. And then he dumped the meal – meat free, he noticed – on a plate and carried it around the house as he ate and explored. At lunchtime, he re-heated more of the food, but by the time he was finished, he had only eaten half of what Hannibal had left for him.

Will found himself in Hannibal's study after his late lunch. He walked to the desk, expecting to see the drawing he had studied a couple nights earlier, but it was gone. Will frowned and let his eyes wander around the room. He wondered where Hannibal had put it. He sat down and pulled open the desk drawer above his lap. Pens and pencils and note pads and other typical stationery supplies were arranged neatly. He closed it and opened a side drawer. He found nothing of interest in there or the second drawer. He closed both and stood up. He walked to the bookcase and ran his fingers along the edges of the books. The titles were all about history and art and philosophy. There were a few antique decorations positioned stylishly on the bookcase. Will noticed one looked a little different than the others. He picked up the small wooden stag's head and turned it over in his hand. The wood looked raw and unpolished and most likely hand-carved. He wondered if Hannibal had done it himself but had never known him to be a whittler. He returned the figure to the shelf and saw a glint of light in the shadow behind it. He furrowed his brow and reached for the strange piece of décor. It was cold and metal and unlike anything else in the room. He pulled it out and smirked, staring into the lens of a tiny camera.

"Well played, Doctor Lecter." He returned the camera to the shelf and turned it around to face the back of the bookcase. Then he began his search for additional cameras.

Will spent an hour searching the house, going from room to room and searching for Hannibal's little spy machines. He found one in nearly every room of the house and he positioned each one so that it could no longer see Will as he came and went. He wondered if Hannibal knew what he was doing. He wondered if the doctor was watching him as he thwarted his plans at spying. He wondered if Hannibal would be mad. He thought briefly about setting them all back so as not to piss off the doctor, but then he decided against it.

Do not leave the house.

Do not try to contact anyone.

Those were the rules. Those were the *only* rules Hannibal said still applied, besides doing as the doctor said -- but he had not banned this particular behavior. So Will, feeling bold and spirited, decided he had done no wrong.

Will spent the next couple of hours leisurely moving from room to room, finding some mundane tasks to hold his interest for short periods of time. It was after five o'clock in the evening when he heard the crunching of gravel outside. He went to a window and looked out in time to see Hannibal's Bentley disappear into the garage. Will went into the study, wondering how long it would take Hannibal to come find him.

He heard the front door open and then close again. He waited behind Hannibal's desk, swiveling back and forth in the chair. But Hannibal didn't come. Will watched the clock on the desk, and when five minutes had passed with no sign from the doctor, Will grew tired of his own game and stood up.

He wandered out of the study and down the hall. He knew where he would find Hannibal. He turned into the dining room and walked through it to the kitchen. Hannibal had removed the suit jacket as well as the waistcoat he had worn earlier that morning. His back was to Will as he removed a single plate from the dish drainer. The one Will had used and washed earlier in the day. Hannibal opened a cabinet and slid it into its place.

"How was your day?" Hannibal asked before turning around.

Will flinched, startled that the doctor had sensed him before he had seen him. "You will have to tell me how you do that someday."

"That is no secret," Hannibal said. He turned around and leaned both hands on the counter. "I have a very keen sense of smell."

"Oh." Will said, feeling self-conscious. "I did shower."

Hannibal smiled. "You smell lovely."

"You didn't come find me."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. "Was I supposed to?"

Will hesitated and then said, "I just thought you might."

"I apologize. I did not realize you were waiting for me."

"It's fine."

"You never did answer my question." When Will lifted his eyebrows, Hannibal repeated, "How was your day?"

"Oh. It was fine."

“Fine? Did you enjoy your privacy?” Hannibal tilted his head, a slight smirk appearing on his face.

Will snorted, thinking about the tiny cameras he had found scattered throughout the house. “Relative privacy.”

“Yes. For the first half of the day.” Hannibal fixed him with a playful and knowing grin.

Will smirked. The doctor had been watching after all. “I wondered why you had begun to trust me so much all of a sudden.”

“I do trust you, Will.”

“Surveillance cameras do allow for an increased level of trust.”

“You are no longer shackled to the bed. And the doors and windows are easily unlocked and opened. I believe that is evidence of a heightened trust in you.”

“Yet you are still surveilling me.”

“You were not surveilled for several hours today, Will. You saw to that.” Hannibal cocked his head. “Yet, I did not rush home to make sure you were still here.”

“I am sure you have some other fail safe in play that I did not find.”

Hannibal said nothing, but the corners of his mouth twitched upward.

Will smirked. “Yes, that is what I thought.”

“Nevertheless, I am curious how you enjoyed your privacy, however relative it may have been.”

Will shrugged before he could think of an appropriate answer.

“I assumed you would enjoy your freedom.”

“Relative freedom,” Will mumbled.

Hannibal tilted his head.

Will sighed and scrubbed his palms over his face. He dropped his hands to his sides, and said, “I’m sorry. I do appreciate being allowed to roam around. I am just a little tired of being alone. Cooped up. Plus, the hangover was not fun.” He paused and then quietly added, “I miss my dogs.”

“How are you feeling now?” Hannibal asked, as though he hadn’t heard half of what Will had said.

Will sighed. “Better.”

“I saw that you ate.”

Will nodded. "A little bit."

"Are you hungry now?"

Will contorted his features. "Not so much."

"I can make something that will take longer to cook."

"Fix whatever you want."

"Will, talk to me."

Will frowned, confused. "I am."

Hannibal smiled. He glided around the counter and joined Will, standing less than an arm's length away. "You are in a mood."

"I just told you why and you basically ignored me."

"I did not ignore you. I understand that you want your full freedom. I thought this would help."

"It does help. But I still miss my old life. My dogs. I miss my *dogs*, Hannibal."

Hannibal frowned. "I know you do."

"Can I see them?"

"Will, they are with Alana."

"I know that."

"How do you propose to see them?"

"Maybe you could ask for one? She'd probably let you have one."

Hannibal smiled. But he didn't look happy or even amused. It was a wry smile. A sad smile. One offered to someone pitied. Will looked away.

"My dear Will." Hannibal reached out and put his palm to Will's cheek. The touch was colder than Will had expected and he shivered. Hannibal frowned and moved his hand to Will's forehead. "You are very warm."

"Yeah. I still have a headache too. I guess that's why I'm in such a mood."

"Perhaps you should take something for your fever."

"I will."

Hannibal looked at him for a long moment and then asked, "If I were to do it, which dog would you have me retrieve?"

Will perked up, lifting his eyes to meet Hannibal's. "Oh, I don't know. Winston, maybe? He tends to keep closest to me."

"And what do you think Alana would do if I asked for Winston?"

Will shrugged. "I think if you said you wanted to feel closer to me by taking in Winston, she'd understand."

"And you do not think she would want to come visit him here?"

Will opened his mouth to speak but no words came out.

"You do not think that she would want to continue to associate with the one creature she believes is closest to you?"

Will sighed and closed his eyes, pinching at the bridge of his nose.

"Will, I know you miss them, but we cannot risk her coming here."

"Why doesn't she?"

"Why doesn't she what?"

"Come here."

"She has not been invited."

"Doesn't she find that strange? You not inviting her, or anyone, over for dinner anymore?"

"She understands that we are all dealing with your disappearance in our own ways. She is too polite to question my method of grief."

"Oh." Will scratched a nail across the edge of the counter. "So that is a firm no on Winston?"

Hannibal reached up and gently cupped Will's cheek again. "I am sorry, my love."

Will met Hannibal's eyes for a moment and nodded. He dropped his gaze. "I assumed as much."

Hannibal leaned closer and then pressed his lips to Will's forehead. The latter closed his eyes.

"I will get you those pills," Hannibal said. He dropped his hand from Will's cheek and turned away, disappearing through the doorway.

Snowy Escapades

Chapter Summary

Will finds some interesting ways to spend his time. A minor rule-breaking puts Hannibal on high alert.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The two of them fell into a routine over the next few days. Hannibal would unshackle Will early in the morning before he left for work. Will would spend his days roaming about the house, trying to keep his cabin fever at bay until Hannibal returned home and they would have dinner together. Then Hannibal would chain Will up again at the end of the night before bed.

Despite his cabin fever – and actual fever that seemed to come and go depending on how much aspirin he had taken – he had enjoyed his newfound freedom. However, feelings of loneliness and frustration would creep under his skin every time Hannibal would chain him to the bed in the guest room. Late in the week, Will's desire to remain free grew exponentially until, finally, he could no longer contain it.

"I don't want to be locked up tonight," Will said as he slowly moved around to the side of the bed. His voice was calm and even. He had learned that that was generally the best approach with Hannibal.

"Will, you know the rules."

"I do, but you have changed the rules before. You could do it again."

"That is something I will spend time thinking about."

"Think about it now," Will said, his impatience growing.

Hannibal stood at the foot of the bed. He stared at Will. "I will think about it later." He leaned down and picked up the ankle cuff. "Come here, please."

"No."

Hannibal fixed him with a stare he wanted to escape from.

"You said you have begun to trust me more, right? Well, trust me tonight."

"Will, I have given you my answer. Please, come here. Do not break our deal."

“How am I breaking our deal? I’m not running. I’m not trying to contact anyone.”

“If you recall, I also said that you are to do as I tell you.”

Will set his jaw. *You are to do as I tell you.* Like he was some kind of animal in the middle of an obedience lesson. “I don’t want to be chained up,” he said quietly through gritted teeth.

“I understand that.”

“Great.”

“Will, you need to come over here so I can put on your restraints.”

“No.”

Hannibal tilted his head, giving Will an admonishing look. “I would rather not have to come get you.” His tone was as polite-sounding as usual, but Will could detect the threatening undertones.

Will knew that if he did not comply, Hannibal would use as much force as necessary to subdue him. Will didn’t want that. But, for some reason, he couldn’t bring himself to give in. He backed away from the bed and stood steadfast across the room from Hannibal.

“Will,” Hannibal said. A warning.

Will folded his arms over his chest.

Hannibal looked away momentarily, laying the ankle cuff on the comforter, and then he returned dangerous eyes to Will.

But it was not until Hannibal took a small, calculated step forward that Will decided to move. He did not move towards compliance, however. Instead, he took a reactive step backward, away from the doctor. Hannibal continued his approach, slowly closing the gap between the two of them. Will waited until the doctor was within arm’s reach before he moved again. He stepped backwards with each of Hannibal’s approaching steps. They moved together, their steps in unison, like some kind of dangerous cat-and-mouse waltz.

A few steps later, Will’s back was against one of the windows. The sill dug into his kidneys as Hannibal continued his advance. Will took a step to his right – the only direction he had left to go. But he was only allowed a few more steps before he was trapped in the corner.

Hannibal stood directly in front of him, only an arm’s length away. Will wondered why Hannibal had not completely closed the gap between the two of them. There was just enough space. Just enough room to allow Will to run. He glanced towards the bedroom door. There was no way he could get around Hannibal and the bed and get to the door before he was caught. And what would be the point in that anyway? He had had plenty of opportunities to run and he hadn’t. He had no desire to do that this time either. He was simply being stubborn. But if he were to run, Hannibal would not see it that way.

Hannibal reached a hand out. Letting his frustration get the better of him, Will smacked the doctor's hand away. Hannibal fixed Will with a stern look. A dangerous look. Will's stomach tightened and bile burned its way up to the back of his throat.

"Will," Hannibal rumbled. It was another warning, and by the look on the doctor's face, Will assumed it would be his last.

Hannibal reached for him again. Will's entire body tensed and he smacked Hannibal's hand again. The doctor's lightning reflexes had Will by the wrists in an instant. Will struggled to get free, but Hannibal pinned him to the wall, glaring into his eyes. Will thought about fighting, thought about bringing his knee up into Hannibal's crotch. But he had to be smarter than that. The doctor would only be down for an instant and then Will would be caught again.

Will forced his muscles to relax, and Hannibal loosened his grip. The doctor took a step back and Will allowed himself to be led by the wrists to the end of the bed. Despite his desire to be free, he knew he had no choice but to comply. At least for the time being.

"Have a seat," Hannibal instructed.

Will did as he was told. Then Hannibal sat beside him and secured the cuff around Will's ankle. Will wondered how long the doctor would leave him locked up. He wondered if it would just be for the night as usual or if he would be punished for his defiance.

Will sat up in bed, leaning back against the headboard. It was morning but still early, only a dim light streaming in around the closed drapes. He had had a terrible night's sleep, tossing and turning, fighting a headache. He dreamt often and all of them were a dark and confusing mixture of Garret Jacob Hobbs and the feathered stag he had gotten so used to. He awoke when it was still dark and had to get up to change his shirt and lay a towel down over the damp spot he had created on the mattress. The middle-of-the-night actions were not foreign to him but it was the first time he had completely soaked one of Hannibal's mattresses. His embarrassment was only mitigated by the fact that Hannibal was not next to him when it happened and may never know about it at all.

When a knock came at the door, Will checked the clock. He had been sitting in bed for over an hour.

"Come in," he said and the door opened.

Will tensed when he saw Hannibal until the doctor smiled at him. "Good morning, Will."

"Hi," Will said, his voice quiet.

"How are you feeling?"

"Okay," he answered. His head still hurt and his skin felt hot to the touch but at least he wasn't having nightmares.

Hannibal approached the bed. He wore a muted blue-and-brown plaid waistcoat with matching pants over a coordinating blue shirt. It was one of Will's favorites on him. He took in a deep breath, not bothering to control the heavy exhalation.

Hannibal glided around the end of the bed and took a seat beside Will. "It is time for me to leave."

Will nodded and looked down at his hands, fidgeting in his lap. He had resisted the doctor the previous night, and he just knew Hannibal was going to punish him for it by leaving the chain on.

"I was not pleased with your defiance last night," Hannibal began.

Will leaned his head back against the headboard and sighed. He expected as much.

"However, you have been doing very well, and minor setbacks are to be expected."

Will met Hannibal's eyes, lifting his eyebrows in anticipation.

"I know how much happier you are when you have some freedom, so we will try this again."

Will couldn't help the relieved smile that spread across his face. "Thank you."

Hannibal nodded and then turned more towards Will. He lifted the edge of the comforter and moved it aside, revealing Will's pants-covered legs from the knees down. Hannibal retrieved the key from his pocket and unlocked Will's ankle cuff.

"The same rules still apply," Hannibal said.

"I understand."

As Hannibal left for work, Will went about his daily routine. After turning the cameras around for privacy as he went from room to room, he took a long shower to wash off the sweat and nightmares from the night before. Then, he had another meatless breakfast that Hannibal had left for him. He found himself at the door to the master bedroom once again. He opened it and slowly stepped inside. He walked to Hannibal's dresser and spun the tiny camera around to face the wall. He walked to the edge of the bed and sat down, running his hands across the satiny fabric of the duvet. Then he kicked his legs up and lay down on Hannibal's side of the bed.

When he awoke again, his eyes flew open. He hadn't meant to fall asleep. He glanced at the clock by the bed and noted that two hours had passed. It had been a dreamless sleep that left him feeling more rested than when he had first awoken earlier that morning. He sat up, running a hand through his hair. When he stood up, his muscles felt stiff, and he stretched.

He sauntered to Hannibal's walk-in closet and stepped inside. He found the light switch on the wall and flicked it on, illuminating neatly arranged rows of shirts and suit jackets and waistcoats to the right, all arranged by color. There were wooden cubby holes to the left and each was filled with a single pair of dress shoes. Along the back wall was a wide, full-length mirror.

Will went to the row of shirts and dragged his finger along the wooden bar from which the hangers were suspended. He found a cranberry-colored dress shirt and pulled the hanger from its spot. He held the shirt out and examined it, trailing his fingers down the collar and then down the button placket. It was one of his other favorites of Hannibal's.

He felt an odd twinge in his stomach and then a smirk formed on his lips. He hung the shirt again, and then quickly removed his own, letting it fall to the floor. He pulled the cranberry dress shirt from its hanger and slipped it on, the luxurious fabric feeling unfathomably smooth against his skin. He buttoned the shirt and then walked to the mirror and peered at his reflection. The shirt hung loosely on his frame and the sleeves bunched slightly at his wrists. He tucked the shirt into his pants which tightened the fit around his midsection, but there was still obviously too much fabric for his slender frame. He turned away from the mirror and walked to the row of waistcoats. He found a black one – Hannibal had worn that particular combination before, which Will had absolutely loved – and he pulled it from its hanger as well. He slipped it on over the cranberry dress shirt and then he buttoned it, noticing how much space there was between it and the shirt. Hannibal had always filled the clothes out much more nicely. Will stared at himself in the mirror, feeling equal parts ridiculous and comforted.

He wandered out of the closet and back into the bedroom. He walked to Hannibal's dresser and found the bottle of foreign and expensive aftershave he knew was there. He always loved the subtle mixture of sweet spiciness that Hannibal wore. He picked up the bottle and emptied a small amount of the liquid into his hand. He rubbed his palms together and then applied the aftershave to his neck.

As the familiar scent wafted into his nose, he closed his eyes. Hannibal's face appeared behind his eyelids and he felt the corners of his mouth twitch. When he opened his eyes, Hannibal was gone.

Will smiled sheepishly to himself, suddenly feeling silly for the impromptu dress-up session. He capped the aftershave bottle and returned to the walk-in closet. He re-hung Hannibal's clothing in their rightful spots and pulled his own shirt back on. As he left the closet, he flicked off the light. Then, he straightened the bed covers and pulled the bedroom door closed behind him.

Will's belly grumbled as he descended the stairs. Breakfast had been several hours earlier and he hadn't eaten much as it was. He went to the kitchen and found the rest of the food Hannibal had left for him. While he waited for it to warm up in the oven, he wandered into the dining room. As he ran his hand over the herbs subtly growing in planters on the wall, he heard an odd sound. A familiar sound. A sound that made him yearn for home.

Will went to the glass doors that led out of the dining room and into the backyard. He peered out and saw the ground covered in snow, more falling in a gentle flurry. The sound came again – a high-pitched yelp that sent a pang through Will's stomach – and he spotted the small white dog nearly camouflaged by snow.

Will pulled the door open and stepped out onto the deck. The air was cold and immediately sent a chill down his spine. He whistled loudly and the dog's ears perked up.

“Hey, what are you doing out here?” he said gently. He crept across the wooden planks of the deck.

With some effort, the dog pushed itself up into a sitting position. Will frowned, noticing the dog favored its left side.

“It’s okay,” Will said, keeping his voice calm and soothing. But as he moved down the steps and into the snow, the dog let out another yelp. Then it turned and limped away from Will.

He stopped. The animal was already hurt, and Will knew that hobbling through snow that was almost as high as the dog would not be good for its injury.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” Will coaxed, as though the dog could understand him. “It’s all right.”

The dog stopped and turned at the sound of Will’s voice. Will crouched down and held out a hand.

“Come here.”

The dog eyed him for a moment and then turned back around and scampered away. Will watched it struggle its way through the snow, out of the back gate, and head towards the trees.

Will jogged back onto the deck and to the dining room door he had left open. He stomped the snow off his boots on the deck and then went inside. He retrieved his coat from the rack near the front door and zipped it. Then he went to the kitchen and pulled the food from the oven, leaving it on the counter. He glanced out the window and then looked back at the food. He wondered if the dog would come for it but then thought he would have a better shot if he offered meat instead.

Will shook his head at the irony and opened the refrigerator. To his surprise, and pleasure, he found a container with what appeared to be very expensive kielbasa. He didn’t want to feed the dog human – if that’s what it was – but he also didn’t want the injured dog to freeze to death out in the snow. He pulled the container from the fridge and set it on the counter. Then he found a hat in the pocket of his jacket and pulled it down over his ears. He grabbed the container and went back to the dining room. He noticed chunks of snow on the dining room floor that he had tracked in despite his efforts. As he went outside, he made a mental note to clean it up before Hannibal returned home.

He stepped onto the deck, pulling the door closed behind him. The dog was nowhere in sight. He trotted down the steps and followed the dog’s tracks. They looked less like paw prints and more like a narrow trail of disturbed snow that led through the open gate. As he trudged through the blazed path, his breath misted out around him and new flakes lightly pelted his cheeks.

Will blinked and he was surrounded by trees. He was no longer walking and he couldn't see the house. His teeth chattered and his insides shuddered at the cold. He wondered how long he had been outside and assumed it was a long time, considering how cold he was. He folded his arms across his chest and felt a pain in his side. He no longer had the container of meat, but even more surprisingly, he realized he no longer wore a coat.

I lost time again.

He turned a slow circle but nothing looked familiar. There was no sign of the dog. He looked down at the snow and saw a single narrow trail that led to where he stood. As he was silently relieved that the path had not been covered over again, he realized it had stopped snowing altogether. He turned and followed the path.

He kept his arms tight to his chest as he walked. He wound his way through the trees, using his previously trudged path as a guide. He had walked for several minutes with no sign of the house, and then, just as he felt worry begin to creep into his chest, he spotted something dark in the snow. He hurried to it and saw that it was his coat. He picked it up and shook the snow off of it and then slid it on. He zipped it up and found a pair of gloves inside, tugging those on as well. He looked down and saw the container of food lying in the snow as well. The lid was still on and the food was still inside. He picked it up and was about to continue along the path when he heard a yelp.

He turned and followed the sound, creating a new path in the snow. The dog let out a few more barks which grew louder. Will spotted the dog just as he came into a small clearing. A felled tree lay to his left and the dog sat beside it. Will approached slowly but when the dog saw him, it limped away.

"It's all right," Will assured. He popped the lid off the container and plucked out a piece of meat. He crouched down and held it out. The dog eyed him but didn't approach. Will took a small, calculated step forward. When the dog didn't move, Will continued. He had taken half a dozen steps when the dog darted away, stumbling through the snow as it moved too fast for its injury.

Sighing, Will went to the felled tree, brushed the snow off of it and sat down.

Hannibal was just leaving his office for the day when he retrieved his phone from his jacket pocket. It had been tucked away for the majority of the day while he conversed with patients during back-to-back appointments. As he walked to his car in the parking lot, he found that he had a notification that the house had been breached nearly two hours earlier. A knot formed in his stomach.

Hannibal got behind the wheel of his car and opened the surveillance feed on his phone, but he found that every single camera in his home had been turned around. He rewound the video feed until he caught a glimpse of something other than the darkness of the walls the cameras faced. But he saw nothing of interest – only Will moving from room to room, turning the cameras around. Hannibal suppressed the growl that was forming within him.

Hannibal started his car and dialed the number of the phone he had given Will in case of emergencies. It rang several times but there was no answer. He tucked his phone away and pulled out of the parking lot. He always assumed he would have to run. But he didn't expect it to happen so soon.

But what if Will hadn't gone to Jack? What if he hadn't betrayed Hannibal at all?

Hannibal wasn't sure he could risk finding out. He didn't think it was the smartest move to drive back home. If the police were waiting for him, it would be much more difficult to escape. But something gnawed at the back of his mind. He didn't want to leave Will behind if he didn't have to. And he wasn't sure he had to. If Will had been gone from the house for nearly two hours, he would have had more than enough time to get to the neighbor's house and phone Jack. The police could be waiting for Hannibal at his home, but in those two hours, why had they not arrived at his office? Why, if Will had turned him in, had he not made sure they came to arrest him at work? No, Hannibal could not leave. Not yet. Not until he was absolutely certain he had no other choice. He wouldn't abandon Will that way.

When Hannibal neared the opening in the trees that revealed his home, he slowed the car. As he rounded the bend, he saw no flashing lights. No people. No cars. No sign of the police whatsoever. He drove up to the house and parked his car in the garage. Then he got out and jogged into the house.

"Will?" Hannibal called.

He went into the kitchen, the aroma of eggs and tomatoes wafting into his nose. He spotted the container of food he had left for Will perched on the counter. The lid lay on the surface beside it. He walked over and felt the side of the dish. It was room temperature. He stepped to the oven and opened the door, mild warmth billowing out. Will had heated the food and then left it out without eating it. Odd.

Hannibal put the lid on the dish and tucked it back into the refrigerator. Then he went to the dining room. There was no sign of Will, but something caught his eye. Something out of place. Something that made his insides crawl. He looked towards the glass doors, his gaze fixed on the smattering of melting snow on the hardwood floor. Will – or someone, at least – had gone outside and then come back in. Hannibal decided to check the house first before running off into the snow.

He went into the entryway and checked the front door. It was locked. Then he walked to the door to his study and opened it.

"Will?" he called again, looking into the empty room.

Hannibal jogged upstairs. He checked the guest bedroom and bathroom, noticing Will's discarded clothing – clothing he had worn to bed the night before – lying in a pile on the bathroom tile. And Will's emergency phone was still on the nightstand. Then, he went to the master bedroom.

As soon as he stepped inside, he was hit with a pleasing combination of fragrances. One was his own aftershave. He glanced at the dresser and noted the bottle had been moved. The other

scent was Will. A sweet, fiery fragrance that burned his nose in an invigorating way.

But there was no Will. He turned and was about to leave the room again when he noticed his closet door was open. He was positive he had slid it closed that morning. He always slid it closed. He walked to the closet and flicked on the light. Will's scent was still strong. Hannibal glanced around the small room. He didn't know why Will would have been in his closet – *had he taken something?* – and he looked for anything out of place. As he eyed his rows of clothing, he took note of the odd spacing on the shirt and waistcoat racks. The clothing was not spaced to Hannibal's liking – two finger widths apart – and he pulled out the shirt that was unevenly placed.

It was a cranberry colored dress shirt. He recalled Will having once mentioned how much he liked the shirt on Hannibal. The shirt was not secured by the top button as Hannibal had left it, but instead it hung wide open and crooked on the hanger, giving it a disheveled look. Hannibal resisted the urge to cringe at the untidiness. He lifted the shirt close to his face, the fiery sweetness growing stronger. He sniffed the fabric, smiling as Will's scent filled his nose. His annoyance at the untidiness was quelled by the thought that the shirt had been wrapped around Will's slender body. The corners of his mouth twitched as he replaced the shirt to its spot, hanging it evenly between the raspberry and crimson dress shirts. He fastened the top button, straightened the shirt on the hanger and left the closet, sliding the door closed behind him.

Hannibal returned downstairs. He went into the dining room and walked around the table towards the glass doors. The chunks of snow were melting onto his floor. He would have to clean it up soon, but he had his priorities. Hannibal looked outside and saw boot prints leading to and from the house. The incoming ones only went out so far, but the ones that led away from the house ran clear across the back yard and through the open gate.

Hannibal saw no other tracks and began to suspect that Will had tried to make an escape after all. He turned and hurried back through the house to the entryway. He didn't know why Will would have left through the back door. The closest neighbors in that direction were several miles away. The notion of another episode of lost time crossed Hannibal's mind. Perhaps he had not been trying escape after all.

But Hannibal had to be sure. He pulled open the armoire in the entryway and retrieved a syringe from his bag. He filled it, replaced the cap and tucked it into the pocket of his coat. He closed the cabinet and hurried back to the dining room. He stepped outside, closing the door behind him. Then he followed Will's tracks out of the yard and into the woods.

Will's feet were going numb. He wasn't sure how long he had been out in the cold – the episode he had experienced had skewed any perception of time. He could only imagine how cold the dog was. He wanted to go back inside, but he couldn't leave the animal to freeze. He had to get it to come inside with him.

He had sat calmly, patiently waiting as the dog had wandered circles around him. With each pass, the dog got a little bit closer. Will kept the food container on his lap and held a slice of sausage in his gloved hand, hoping the smell would be enough to lure the dog to him.

The dog made several passes until finally it was only a few feet away. If Will leaned forward and stretched his arm out, he would be able to grab the dog. But he didn't want to scare it. So he waited. His arm was resting on his knee and he slid it forward, holding the sausage out for the dog to sniff. The dog looked at the sausage, then up at Will, then his head snapped to the side and his ears perked up. Then, the dog bounded away, limping through the snow.

Will sighed and frowned. He wasn't sure what had spooked the dog. He sat quietly and listened and then a few moments later, he heard the distant sound of crunching snow.

Another animal, perhaps?

But then came a familiar voice.

"William," the doctor called. His voice was low and even. It wasn't the tone that seized Will's stomach but rather the use of his full name. Hannibal rarely called him that – only when he was upset with Will.

Will shifted on the felled tree to look over his shoulder. Hannibal appeared between two trees, one gloved hand hanging at his side and the other tucked into the pocket of his buttoned coat.

"Hey," Will said as casually as he could muster.

"What are you doing out here?" Hannibal asked. He walked around in front of Will and stood more than an arm's length away.

Will waved a hand towards the numerous paw prints in the snow. "There's a dog."

Hannibal held his gaze for a few moments before looking down at the snow-covered ground. His expression didn't change as he returned his gaze to Will.

Will looked at the paw prints and frowned. "I think, anyway."

"I see the tracks, Will," Hannibal said. His voice was softer than it had been moments earlier. "Where is it now?"

"I don't know." Will looked off in the direction the dog had run. "He got scared and took off. Or she. I haven't gotten close enough to tell just yet."

"Let's go back to the house."

"No," Will protested. "It was so close."

"Will—"

"Please," he interrupted. "It's injured."

Hannibal stared down at Will, his features as sharp and angular as ever. His expression was even but there was a glint in his eye. One that made Will uncomfortable. He looked away, resisting the urge to swallow the knot that was forming in his throat. His eyes came to rest

somewhere around Hannibal's hip, and he noticed movement in the pocket of Hannibal's coat. Will felt heat wash over him despite the chill in the air.

"I didn't go anywhere," Will reassured. His gaze was transfixed on Hannibal's pocket. He could venture a guess as to what was in it, but he hoped he wouldn't have to find out for sure.

"You left the house."

Will frowned. "I didn't talk to anyone. I've been out here the whole time."

"William, we had a deal."

"We still do. I didn't run. I haven't—" He finally swallowed the knot that threatened to choke him. He lowered his voice and finished, "I haven't betrayed you."

The movement in Hannibal's pocket stopped. Will held his breath as Hannibal removed his hand from his pocket. He had no glove on that hand but it was empty. Will exhaled heavily.

"You cannot leave the house like that."

"I know, but—"

"But what?"

Will smiled sheepishly and looked out at the trees again. "But there was a dog."

Hannibal emitted a low chuckle that surprised Will. The latter looked up at the doctor who moved to sit beside Will on the felled tree. Will scooted over, unable to control the groan that escaped his lips.

"Are you all right?" Hannibal asked.

"Yes," Will said, noting the odd pain in his side. "I have been sitting for a while. I'm just cold and stiff."

Hannibal sat beside Will on the felled tree. He was unhappy that Will had left the house, but he was pleased that it had only been in rescue of a dog. Hannibal had stroked the syringe, toying with the idea of uncapping it and stabbing it into Will's neck. But the other man had seemed so genuine, and Hannibal believed him. He believed that Will hadn't tried to contact anyone. He believed that he had left the house for the sole purpose of saving the dog. Hannibal couldn't argue with that. Or, more accurately, he didn't want to.

The small, white dog had circled them three times, slinking closer with each pass. It hunkered in the snow a mere few feet away, shivering and eyeing the two of them warily. Hannibal sat still and patient. Will had a slice of meat in hand – Hannibal cringed at the thought of his perfectly good meat being wasted on a canine – and he moved his arm forward in an attempt to entice the dog.

“Come here,” Will said. “It’s all right.” His voice was gentle and soothing, but Hannibal detected a slight tremor in it as well.

“How long have you been out here?”

Will kept his hand with the meat outstretched but turned his head to look at Hannibal. “I’m not sure.”

“You are shivering.”

“It’s cold.”

He gave Will an admonishing look and said, “You need to get back inside where it’s warm.”

“In a bit.” Will returned his attention to the dog. “He’s so close.”

“Ten minutes,” Hannibal said.

Will nodded, but Hannibal doubted it was in agreement. He knew Will would fight tooth and nail to do whatever he could to bring the dog in. Hannibal didn’t want to have to drag Will in unconscious.

As Will shivered next to him, Hannibal kept an eye on his watch. It was just past the seven minute mark when the dog began to crawl on its belly towards Will. It would raise up in the snow just enough to be able to walk, move a few inches, lie down again, and repeat. Will kept his focus on the dog but reached over with his free hand and grabbed Hannibal’s wrist, squeezing gently. Hannibal sat still and watched as the dog continued its progress until it was finally within reach of the treat.

The dog pushed itself up and stretched its neck out, nipping the meat from Will’s hand. Will withdrew his arm and retrieved another piece of meat. He held it out for the dog, keeping his hand a few inches closer to his body. The dog took a small step forward and nipped that piece as well. Will fed it a few more pieces, drawing the dog nearer with each treat. After half a dozen pieces, the dog was between Will’s knees. Will pet it gently on top of its head. The dog stayed put, eyeing the container of meat on Will’s lap. Will scratched behind the dog’s ears and fed it another treat.

“Okay,” Will said. “Maybe we can get it back to the house.”

Will instructed that they both stand up slowly, one after the other. Hannibal went first, startling the dog only slightly. Then, Will stood up. He fed the dog another treat and then he and Hannibal started back towards the house. Hannibal glanced over his shoulder every few feet to make sure Will was close, and he noticed that the younger man was doing the same with the dog. When they reached the house, Hannibal hung his coat near the front door and then went to the kitchen to make tea. He didn’t know how long Will had been outside, but judging by his shivering and rosy complexion, he assumed it was too long. As the tea brewed, he heard Will talking to the dog in the dining room. When the tea finished, Hannibal poured it into a teacup and joined Will in the dining room.

“I brought you tea.”

“Thanks,” Will said, not looking up. He was lying on the floor beside the dog, petting it as it ate slivers of sausage off the hardwood floor. Will had removed his gloves and hat but still wore his coat.

“Will,” Hannibal said.

“Yes?” The empath continued to pet the dog. When the silence grew, he finally looked up at Hannibal, his eyebrows raised.

“Come drink some tea.”

“I will.”

“You were outside too long, Will. You need to warm up.” When Will sighed, Hannibal continued, saying, “The dog is not going anywhere.”

Will scratched behind the dog’s ears again. “Fine.” He sat up and then let out a groan as he got to his feet.

Hannibal furrowed his brow, looking the man over. “What was that?”

“What was what?” Will asked. He took the teacup from Hannibal and sipped.

“That groan.” He paused. “Are you hurt?”

“No, I—” Will frowned. “I don’t know. My side kind of hurts, but I’m all right.”

Hannibal took a small step forward. He reached out and grabbed the zipper of Will’s coat.

“What are you—”

Zip.

“Hannibal, I’m fine.”

Hannibal took both sides of Will’s coat in his hands and pulled them apart. When he saw the dried blood matted to Will’s shirt, he didn’t even try to stop his mouth from falling open.

“What?” Will said and then looked down. “Oh. What the—”

“What happened?” Hannibal asked. He took the teacup from Will and set it on the table. Then he removed Will’s coat and hung it on the back of a chair. He grabbed the hem of Will’s shirt and pulled it up.

Will flinched, taking a step backwards. Hannibal moved with him, keeping a hold of the shirt. Will’s abdominal muscles tightened and he let out another groan.

Hannibal examined the wound. It was a shallow laceration off to the right side of his abdomen. It ran vertically for three of four inches. The blood around it had already dried.

“The bleeding has stopped,” Hannibal said.

“That’s good.”

“It’s not very deep. I don’t believe you need stitches, but it does need cleaning.”

“Okay.”

“Come with me,” Hannibal said. “I have supplies in the bathroom.”

Hannibal led Will upstairs to the master bathroom. Will sat on the closed toilet lid, and Hannibal told him to remove his shirt as the doctor retrieved medical supplies from an upright cabinet in the corner. He scooted a step stool close to Will, pulled on a pair of gloves, and tended to the wound.

“What happened?” he asked as he began to clean the gash.

“I don’t know.”

Hannibal’s eyes were on the wound, but he could see the other man’s face contort oddly. He understood. “You lost time.”

Silence. And then, moments later, Will whispered, “Yes.”

“Perhaps it was not the best idea to leave you unsupervised in the house.”

Will frowned. “I don’t need a babysitter.”

“This is the first time you have injured yourself.”

Will opened his mouth but then closed it again, looking away.

Hannibal said nothing more about it. He finished cleaning the wound, applied an antiseptic, and opened a packet of butterfly bandages. Will winced when the doctor pulled his skin tight and applied a small bandage. Hannibal repeated the process three more times until the length of the wound was closed.

“You’re not going to lock me up again, are you?”

“That was part of our deal.”

“Tonight, sure. But I mean during the day, when you’re gone.”

Hannibal opened a patch of gauze. “I do not like the idea of you hurting yourself.”

“It’s not like I did it on purpose.”

“That does not make it any better.”

Will grabbed Hannibal’s wrist, stilling his hand. “Please, don’t,” he whispered.

Hannibal looked up at him. “We had a deal.” He returned his focus to Will’s wound. “I will adhere to that so long as I feel you are not a significant threat to yourself.”

“And do you feel that?”

“It was one incident. I believe we can call it a fluke for the time being.”

Will let go of his wrist, and Hannibal covered the wound with gauze. He held it in place as he removed the roll of medical tape from the kit and gracefully ripped off a piece with one hand. He taped the gauze in place and then tore off three more pieces, completely securing the gauze over Will’s wound.

“You are finished.”

“Thanks,” Will said, examining the bandage.

Hannibal removed his gloves and tossed them in the trash bin next to the sink. He closed the medical kit and returned it to the cabinet.

“Are you warm now?” Hannibal asked.

“Warmer, yes.”

Hannibal eyed him. “Come on,” he said. “Why don’t you go get a clean shirt, and I will make you some more tea.”

Chapter End Notes

Still more to come!

I've finished writing the fic (yay!), and now I'm just trying to do minor edits so I can get all the chapters posted.

Comments are always welcome! :D Comments are my life blood. ♥

A Hard Bargain

Chapter Summary

Hannibal makes a change in his & Will's arrangement, Will allows himself to *see* Hannibal, the fate of the dog is decided, & an innocent afternoon walk has dire repercussions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal brewed more tea for Will, leaving him in the dining room with the dog as he went to the kitchen to start dinner. Hannibal had never had pets for a reason. The thought of the dog getting mud and hair all over his floor was not a pleasant one. Not to mention the sausage grease and saliva. He had thought about asking Will to take it back outside, or at least to the basement, but he thought better of it. Hannibal hadn't seen Will so pleased or animated in weeks and he didn't want to destroy that. As much as he despised the uncleanliness of pets, he also knew he had plenty of cleaning products to make up for it. So instead of banishing the dog, he swallowed his disapproval and went to make dinner.

As the liver pate baked in the oven, Hannibal returned to the dining room to find Will on the floor beside the dog again.

"Does he or she require a blanket?" Hannibal asked, mentally cringing at the thought of one of his lavish throws being used to warm an animal.

"He." Will glanced up, a small smile on his face. "I think he's okay. He's not shivering anymore. And he's eating like a starved wolf."

Hannibal refrained from breathing a sigh of relief about the blanket.

"He could probably use some water though. I'll get a bowl."

"I'll get it," Hannibal offered as Will pushed himself up into a sitting position.

"Oh, okay."

He knew which bowls he could afford to bequeath to the animal. He didn't want Will opening a random cabinet and ending up using one of his Tiffany pieces as a dog bowl. Hannibal found a small mixing bowl he rarely used and filled it with water, and then he returned to the dining room. He set the bowl down beside the dog who was lapping at the grease on the floor. When he saw the water, he stopped licking the floor and began drinking from the bowl instead.

“Thanks, Hannibal.” Will pet the dog in long strokes down its back. “I think he’s hurt, though. He was limping pretty badly outside. I want to take him to the vet.”

“You know you cannot do that.”

“What if it’s bad?”

Hannibal didn’t bother restraining his sigh. “Will, you cannot go out in public and risk being recognized.”

“You’re really going to let this poor dog suffer?” Will looked up at Hannibal, eyes wide and misty.

Hannibal felt a strange sensation in his chest but tried to ignore it as best he could. Quietly, he said, “I will take it.”

Will smiled and exhaled a puff of air that sounded somewhere between a sigh of relief and a laugh. “Really?”

“Yes. Tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you, Hannibal.”

“You’re welcome.”

While waiting for dinner to finish cooking, Hannibal split his time between preparing dessert in the kitchen and sipping wine in the dining room. Will rarely looked up from the dog who had finished eating and drinking and was lying near the water bowl with his eyes open. Will was propped up on an elbow, petting the dog in long strokes down its matted fur coat. When dinner was finished, Hannibal plated their meals in the kitchen and returned to the dining room.

“Dinner is ready.”

“Okay,” Will muttered from the floor.

When he made no move to get up, Hannibal said, “Will. Join me, please.”

Will slowly got to his feet, groaning as he did so. He gently put a hand to his injured side and grimaced.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, it’s just a little sore. I’ll go wash my hands and be right back.”

“All right.” Hannibal stood beside his chair, waiting for Will to return. He stared down at the dog whose head rested on his paws. His eyes were closed.

“Okay,” Will said. “I think I’m ready now.”

Hannibal waved a hand towards the plate he had set down for Will. Then, he sat down in his own seat across the table. When Will was seated, Hannibal began to eat.

“So you’ll take the dog in the morning?”

“Yes.”

“First thing?”

Hannibal smiled. “First thing.”

“I was thinking about giving him a bath tonight. He’s kind of dirty.”

Hannibal cringed internally but tried not to let it show. It was too cold to wash the dog outside, so that meant Will would want to wash him in the bathtub. “It might not be the best idea to have the dog stand on its injured leg while you bathe it.”

Will frowned. “He can’t be comfortable like that.”

Hannibal glanced down at the dog who was closer to his chair than Will’s. He hadn’t moved since Will had gotten up to wash his hands. “He seems very comfortable at the moment.”

Will shifted in his seat to look at the dog. He smiled. “I guess so.”

“Perhaps I can have the vet wash him tomorrow.”

“Good idea.”

The two of them ate, casually conversing about their day. After dinner and dessert, Will helped Hannibal clean up and then returned to the dog. Satisfied that Will was properly occupied, Hannibal went to his study.

He slid onto the bench behind the piano and eyed the sheet music to an original composition. It had been weeks since he had worked on it – or touched the piano at all – and his fingers were itching to play. Personally, Hannibal preferred the harpsichord with its sharper, more dramatic sound, but months earlier, Will expressed his preference for the mellifluous sound of the piano. Hannibal had gone out the following weekend and purchased a piano, rearranging some furniture to make room in his study.

As his fingers danced on the keys, he thought back to the last time he had sat behind the piano. Will had perched beside him, smiling the entire time Hannibal played. When he finished, Will had complimented him and expressed his desire to learn an instrument. Hannibal had given him a brief lesson. Will was a willing student but had no grace in his fingers. At least, not when it came to the piano.

Hannibal smiled at the memory.

He was halfway through the piece when the door to the study opened. Will walked in with the dog wrapped in his arms. He smiled in Hannibal’s direction. Then he walked to the chaise lounge and sat down. Hannibal continued to play, keeping his focus on the sheet music in

front of him, but out of the corner of his eye he could see that Will was turned around in his seat, watching Hannibal as he played.

When Hannibal finished, he grabbed a pencil from the top of the piano and made a minor change to his piece.

“That was lovely,” Will said.

“Thank you.” Hannibal looked at Will who had both arms lying on the back of the chaise lounge and his chin resting on the back of his hand. “Did you need something?”

“No. I just heard you playing and wanted to come listen.”

Hannibal didn’t even try to hide his smile. “I have missed that.”

“So have I.” A small smile washed over Will’s face as well. Then he lifted his chin, waved a hand and said, “Please, continue.”

Hannibal nodded and turned back to the piano. He shuffled the music on his stand and found a second original piece he had finished months ago. He had only played it for Will a few times but the younger man had raved about it each time. He wondered what kind of effect it would have on him now.

As he began to play, he kept his peripheral focus on Will who had begun to pet the dog. Hannibal couldn’t see it from where he sat, on account of the back of the lounge, but Will’s attention was downcast and Hannibal could tell that the dog was no longer on the floor. He forced himself not to stop the piece mid-song and demand that Will get the dog off of his furniture. Instead, he continued to play, taking note when Will re-directed his attention towards Hannibal. Hannibal stole a glance Will’s direction halfway through the song and his chest tightened at the smile spread across Will’s face. Hannibal hadn’t seen that particular smile in months.

When Hannibal finished the piece, Will exhaled heavily. The doctor looked at him.

Will smiled gently and said, “That one’s my favorite.”

I know, Hannibal thought. “Thank you, Will.”

Hannibal played through a few more songs. As he neared the end, he noticed that Will was no longer resting his head on the back of the chaise lounge. He saw Will’s feet hanging over the end of the lounge and his shoes on the floor beside it.

When he finished, Hannibal spun on the bench and stood up. He walked to the lounge and saw Will on his back. His eyes were closed and the dog was asleep on his chest. Hannibal smiled.

“Will,” the doctor said quietly. He lightly placed a hand on Will’s shoulder.

Will’s eyes fluttered open. He looked up at Hannibal and then glanced around the room. “What time is it?”

“It is late. Come on. Let’s go upstairs.”

He closed his eyes again and shifted on the lounge.

“I’m comfortable.”

“You will not be in the morning when you awaken with stiff and sore muscles. This piece of furniture is not long enough for you.”

Will re-opened his eyes and looked at the dog who was sound asleep. He took the dog in his hands as he sat up. The dog roused and Will moved to set it down beside him.

“On the floor, please,” Hannibal said.

Will put the dog on the floor. It immediately curled up on the rug in front of the chaise lounge and closed its eyes.

Hannibal held out his hand. Will took it and got to his feet. He stretched his arms and neck and then bent down to give the dog a quick pat. The two of them walked out of the room together, and Hannibal left the door open enough to allow the dog to leave if it wanted to. Then, he and Will went upstairs.

Will glanced over his shoulder as he and Hannibal exited the latter’s study. The dog was curled up on the floor in front of the chaise lounge. He looked comfortable enough, but Will couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt, leaving the dog alone for the night.

He thought about asking Hannibal if he could bring it upstairs. But he was already surprised that Hannibal had let it into the house at all and then allowed it to sleep on his Persian rug. Will thought it best not to try his luck by requesting more roaming space for the dog. It would be all right alone downstairs for the night.

Will ascended the stairs ahead of Hannibal. When he reached the top, he turned towards the guest bedroom.

“Will.”

He turned to see Hannibal stopped at the top of the stairs. “Yeah?”

Hannibal held a hand out. “Come here.”

Will looked from Hannibal’s outstretched hand up to his face and then back again. He took a tentative step forward and placed his hand in the doctor’s. Hannibal squeezed gently and then led Will away from the guest bedroom. Will followed him until they reached the door to the master bedroom.

“What’s going on?”

Hannibal didn't answer until they were both standing in the master bedroom. "I would like for you to sleep in our bed tonight."

Will felt the corners of his mouth turn upward. *Our bed*. The words rang in his head, but he was confused. He looked up at Hannibal who had a glint in his eye. It wasn't the same glint he had seen the previous night when he had refused to be chained up, or even earlier in the day when Hannibal approached him in the woods. No, this look was softer, almost playful.

"Are you going to bring the chain in here instead?"

"No."

Will glanced towards the foot of the bed. He half-expected to see a second chain already attached. When he didn't, he frowned in confusion.

"I am going to trust you tonight," Hannibal answered his unspoken question.

Will raised his eyebrows and looked at Hannibal. He wasn't sure what he looked like at that moment but it must have been at least mildly amusing because Hannibal let out a soft chuckle.

"Why?" Will asked.

"I believe you have earned some trust back."

"Some."

"A lot, Will. You have followed the rules very well."

"Like a dog." Will frowned.

"Like someone I have wanted to be able to trust again."

Will opened his mouth to speak but firmly placed his lips together again. What he was about to say certainly would not have helped his case. He swallowed his sarcasm and instead said, "Thanks."

Hannibal nodded once. He reached up and cupped Will's cheek against his palm. Will froze, his eyes darting all around Hannibal's face, never meeting his eyes. Hannibal caressed Will's skin with his thumb and then slowly moved his hand so that his thumb brushed across Will's mouth. He traced the line of Will's lips and Will parted them slightly. He finally looked at Hannibal's eyes for the first time and saw that they were focused on Will's mouth. He was sure the doctor was going to kiss him. He wanted to pull away, but he couldn't bring himself to do so. Something inside of him craved the affection. As Hannibal's thumb reached the corner of his mouth, Will wet his lips. He waited for Hannibal to lean in, but he didn't. Instead, he smiled and let his hand drop to his side. Then he turned around and walked to his dresser.

Will's stomach fluttered. As he watched Hannibal remove his watch, he mentally chastised himself for feeling disappointment.

Hannibal walked to the bed. He fished in the pocket of his trousers, pulled out his phone and set it on the nightstand. He sat down on the edge of the bed and removed his shoes. Then, he stood and unbuttoned his waistcoat, slipping it off. He took it and the shoes and walked to the closet. He slid the door open and went inside. Will saw the closet light turn on but lost sight of Hannibal.

This is huge, he thought. Hannibal had been very strict about the rules just a few days earlier. Now he was allowing Will to not only sleep without the ankle cuff but to also do so right beside Hannibal. Will was relieved that he was receiving more and more of his freedom. He couldn't screw it up. He couldn't do anything that might cause Hannibal to feel betrayed in the slightest. There would be no redemption for him if he messed up now.

Hannibal emerged from the closet and Will started. The doctor was completely naked. But he didn't look at Will. He didn't acknowledge him in the least. He casually strolled to the dresser and opened a drawer. Will watched the doctor's lean, solid body flex and relax, the muscles moving beneath his skin in a tantalizing way. He was lean but not too thin. Strong but not too muscular. Will thought he looked a little more toned than usual too. He felt blood rush southward and he forced himself to look away.

He should have been repulsed by the man in front of him. He should have been disgusted by the things he had done – and, most likely, would continue to do. But he wasn't. Hannibal was gorgeous and despite knowing the truth, Will still had feelings for him. He told himself he could settle for equal parts repulsed and in love, but in all honesty, those feelings were nowhere near equal.

Hannibal pulled a pair of red pajama pants from the drawer and unfolded them. He slipped them on and tied the strings, securing the pants tightly to his lean waist. Then, he turned towards the bed, watching Will as he went.

Will realized he hadn't moved since Hannibal had touched his lips. He cleared his throat, feeling heat rush into his cheeks. He waited until Hannibal turned away before he began to undress. He slipped off his shoes as Hannibal threw back the duvet. As Will unbuttoned his shirt, he noticed Hannibal watching him from the edge of the bed. Feeling self-conscious, he held his shirt together with both hands.

It was only a few hours earlier that he had been shirtless in front of Hannibal. But that was different. It had felt different anyway. He was injured and Hannibal was treating the wound as a doctor. But now...

Now they were in the bedroom. Hannibal had just been naked in front of Will – who hadn't kept his arousal at bay very well – and Will felt like being naked, or even shirtless, in this context was much different.

He turned around and walked to his dresser, his back to Hannibal. He wanted to re-button his shirt, but that would get Hannibal's attention and he really didn't feel up to discussing his current feelings. Instead, he took in a deep breath and let his shirt drop to the floor. Then he opened a drawer, snatched a dark gray t-shirt, and quickly pulled it on. Then, he unbuckled his belt, his pants immediately drooping to his hips. He unfastened them and let them fall to

the floor where he stepped out of them. He turned around and saw Hannibal leaning back against the headboard, staring at him.

Hannibal smiled gently. “Come to bed, Will.”

Will’s stomach flip-flopped as he walked to the bed. It reminded him of the way it had felt when they had become more than friends-slash-doctor-and-patient. Or the first time Hannibal had kissed him. Or the first time they had been intimate. But it wasn’t the same. It was exciting in the sense that he was gaining more freedom, but that excitement was tainted. He was nervous about crawling into bed beside the man he loved. The thought made his stomach tighten in a less pleasant way. He didn’t want to feel that. He didn’t want to be nervous or sick to his stomach around – and because of – Hannibal. He wanted things to go back to the way they were before. But he knew better. Things would never be able to go back. Too much had happened, and too many secrets – or rather, one very big one – had been revealed. Any innocence that had been left in their relationship had disappeared with that revelation.

Will couldn’t go back, and he couldn’t force Hannibal not to do the things that he did. He knew the only way he would be able to reconcile his feelings was to try to understand. He had always been good at that – at empathizing. He could understand what others were thinking and feeling because he could so easily imagine himself in their shoes. He knew he had to try. In fact, he knew it wouldn’t take much trying at all. Empathizing came naturally to him. What he had to try at was keeping himself from doing that. That was what he had been doing with Hannibal for so long. Instead of allowing his nature to come through where Hannibal’s hobby was concerned, he had been forcing it down. He hadn’t wanted to empathize. He hadn’t wanted to understand. He hadn’t wanted to see murder through Hannibal’s eyes – those beautiful, accepting eyes – and he had resisted for weeks.

But Will knew that if the two of them were ever to return to some semblance of a normal relationship, he had to be able to accept Hannibal, even if he didn’t agree with his actions.

Will sat down on the edge of the bed, his back to Hannibal. He put both hands down on the comforter on either side of him, bracing himself. He let his chin fall as he exhaled a sigh.

“Will?”

Will said nothing and made no effort to respond. A moment later, the bed shifted and then he felt the gentle pressure of Hannibal’s hand against his back, rubbing lightly between his shoulder blades. Will glanced over his shoulder at the man who stared back at him with eyes the color of blood-soaked amber. Eyes that used to cause his stomach to flip with excitement. Now, they only made his stomach tremble with nerves.

“What’s on your mind, good Will?”

“I’m just thinking.”

“About something you’d like to discuss?”

“I’m trying to understand.” When Hannibal said nothing, Will continued. “I shot Garret Jacob Hobbs. I killed a man because I had to. Because he was trying to kill his daughter. But

you...” He paused and sighed.

“Will, you nearly emptied an entire clip into Hobbs. Do you believe it took that many rounds to stop him?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t thinking about it too hard at the time. I just knew I had to stop him.”

“You kept pulling the trigger because it felt good.”

Will looked over his shoulder. Hannibal was directly behind him, their faces less than a foot apart.

“You felt powerful stopping Hobbs.” It wasn’t a question, but Hannibal seemed to be waiting for a reply nonetheless.

Will nodded. “I did,” he whispered.

“Every man has within him the capacity to kill. Killing makes known our power. It reveals our strength and dominance within our species. It is not an inhuman thing.”

“Maybe not inhuman. *Inhumane*, perhaps.”

“Do you believe killing Hobbs was inhumane?”

Will parted his lips to speak but then closed his mouth again. He shook his head.

“You do not feel it was inhumane because it wasn’t.”

“It’s a blurry line between justified and not.”

“Were you justified in killing Hobbs?”

“Yes,” Will said without hesitation. “But shooting a man nearly a dozen times?”

“You are a powerful creature, Will. Your capabilities should not be repressed.”

Will met Hannibal’s gaze again. They stared at each other. Will’s brow was furrowed but Hannibal’s face was relaxed. Soft. His eyes even looked warm.

“That makes you happy. Me killing someone.”

“It pleases me when you do not deny your nature.”

“Just as you do not deny yours?”

“Would you have me deny mine?”

Will sighed and turned around again. *Hell yes*. That’s what he wanted to say. That’s what he should have said. But what good would it do?

“If I had denied my nature, you and I would not be here now.”

Will snorted. “I wouldn’t be a prisoner in your house?” He felt Hannibal’s hand on his waist and he tensed.

“We would not have met.”

Will wanted to tell him that that would have been better. Good, in fact. But he couldn’t. His mouth wouldn’t form the words and even if they could have, his mind wouldn’t have believed them.

“That man you—The one in the bowling alley...” When Hannibal said nothing, Will continued. “He was the owner of that restaurant we went to. The asshole who yelled at his waiter in front of everyone.”

Hannibal made a short humming sound deep in his throat. Neither a confirmation nor a denial.

“Is that why you...”

“You know how I dislike discourtesy.”

Will nodded. And then he snorted a wry laugh. “I don’t know how I didn’t pick up on that sooner. You were mocking them.” Will shook his head. “And the ostentation. Every single person was displayed in some way that resembled a work of art. It took me so long to see it.”

“You did not want to see it,” Hannibal whispered behind his ear.

“You’re right about that.”

“But now you see.”

Will nodded.

“You are aware of me just as I am aware of you.”

Will turned to look at Hannibal again. The doctor was much closer now, only inches from Will’s face.

“You are not free of darkness, dear Will. Nor am I free of light.”

Will furrowed his brow. He had never considered that before. The Chesapeake Ripper, in his mind, had always been pure darkness. Evil. Someone who should be locked away for the rest of his life. But now, staring into the face of the one person who had ever understood him, the one person who had tried to help him, no matter how manipulative or ulterior his motives might have been, he knew that wasn’t the truth. Sure, the things Hannibal had done were awful. Horrific. They were the things that kept Will up at night. The reason he drank two fingers of whisky most evenings in order to avoid waking up drenched in sweat. But that wasn’t all of Hannibal. Hannibal was intelligent and artistic. Polite. Insightful. He could even be tender at times. But most of all, he understood Will.

And he accepted him.

Will glanced at Hannibal's lips, chastising himself for his weakness. He started to turn away, refusing to give in, when Hannibal slid his hand to the back of Will's neck and held him in place. Then, the doctor leaned in and pressed his lips to Will's. Will let out a quiet moan as he kissed Hannibal, a knot forming in his throat.

Hannibal's hand remained on the back of Will's neck, but the doctor's other hand snaked around his waist, coming to a rest at the small of his back. Hannibal parted Will's lips with his tongue and kissed Will furiously. Will's stomach churned with nerves as he turned his whole body towards the doctor.

"Hannibal," he said, but his voice was quiet and muffled against the doctor's mouth.

Hannibal moved the hand on Will's back to his side and squeezed. Then he slipped his slender fingers beneath the hem of Will's shirt, gently caressing his skin above his waistband.

Will panted, wanting to pull away and wanting more at the same time. He let his hands come to a rest on Hannibal's waist, keeping his touch light and unassuming. Hannibal danced his fingers across Will's stomach, causing a chill to spread across the younger man's skin.

Will turned his head to break the kiss, feeling the pressure of Hannibal's possessive hand against the back of his neck. He inhaled deeply and let it out in a ragged breath.

"This might be too soon," Will whispered, staring down at the comforter. The pressure at the back of his neck decreased.

"My apologies, dear Will." Hannibal's voice was gentle and soothing.

Will brought both hands to rest in his own lap. Hannibal removed his hand from beneath Will's shirt and rested both hands at Will's waist, gripping gently.

"I did not mean to rush you."

"I know. It's okay." What was he saying? How was it okay? The man he was just kissing was a serial killer and – *oh, God!* – a cannibal. That was anything but okay. Hannibal had been kissing Will with the same mouth he used to...

Will squeezed his eyes shut. Hannibal's hands moved from his sides and Will felt the bed shift beneath him. He opened his eyes to see that Hannibal had returned to his side of the bed, sitting up and leaning back against the headboard.

"Come, sit. I promise I will not kiss you again. Not until you ask me to."

Will eyed Hannibal momentarily, wondering if that was really the end of it. Wondering if he really wanted that to be the end of it. He crawled up to the head of the bed and shifted to lean back against the headboard. Unsure of what to say, he stared down at his hands fidgeting in his lap.

"I have missed you, Will."

Will closed his eyes for a moment, flashes of memories coming back to him. Memories of the two of them in the bedroom together, cuddling, sleeping. *Other things*. He shook his head, trying to rid his mind of the image.

“If this is too difficult for you—”

“What? You will chain me up in the guest bedroom again?” The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. He cringed and chewed his bottom lip.

“No,” Hannibal said softly. “I was going to say that I would leave you alone for the night.”

Will furrowed his brow and looked at Hannibal for the first time in several minutes. “You’d sleep elsewhere and let me have the room to myself?”

“If that is what you want.”

Will entertained the idea. He imagined Hannibal re-locating to the guest bedroom. He imagined himself sprawled out on the king-sized bed by himself. The idea seemed strange.

“No,” Will whispered. “I don’t want that.”

Hannibal offered a small smile. “In the morning, I would like to cook a big breakfast for you.”

“Oh,” Will said, caught off guard by the sudden change in subject. “As opposed to the tiny or non-existent breakfasts you fix now?”

Hannibal grinned briefly, and then it disappeared. “You are too thin. We need to do something about that.”

“I’m...” Steering clear of his wound, Will put a reflexive hand to his stomach which was leaner than usual and flat even in his current sitting position.

“You have lost a lot of weight.”

“Not a lot.”

“Will.”

“Okay, a lot.”

“I would like to reverse that. I will cook for you, as I normally do, but we will focus on getting you to consume larger portions. Also, you need meat. You have been unable to maintain your muscle mass for lack of protein.”

Will’s head spun with the amount of information Hannibal was throwing at him. But through the rant, Will’s mind caught on one word – *meat*.

“No,” Will said curtly.

“No?”

“I’m not eating meat,” Will said firmly.

“Will.”

“No.”

“Will. You are wasting away.”

“You are being dramatic.”

“Am I?”

Will’s ears burned. He didn’t like to focus on himself, and especially not in that capacity.

“Can we not talk about this?”

“Dear Will, I am wont to placate you on most occasions, but on this I must stand firm.”

“So, you’re not going to let it go.”

“No.”

Will let out an exasperated sigh. “Damn it, Hannibal.”

“I do not like seeing you this way.”

Will shifted uncomfortably and then folded his arms. He couldn’t bring himself to even glance in the doctor’s direction.

“You are still beautiful,” Hannibal said, his voice gentle. Gentler than Will had heard it in weeks. “But this is not good for you. I am trying to help.”

“I’m not eating people,” Will said. The words sounded ridiculous to his ears. He might have laughed if any part of it had been untrue.

“Okay.”

Will furrowed his brow. “Okay?”

“Yes. I will make sure that you are not eating anyone.”

Will closed his eyes and shook his head. “How can you say that so casually?”

Hannibal must have known it was a rhetorical question because he didn’t bother with an answer. “I promise, Will.”

Will raised his eyebrows, finally turning his head to look at the doctor. “I am going to hold you to that.”

“I would expect nothing less.”

The two of them soon lay down beneath the blankets. Will was on his back, his stomach feeling tight and filled with nerves when the doctor rolled onto his side to face him. Will glanced his way, his whole body tensing. Hannibal reached out and brushed a lock of hair away from Will's forehead. Will swallowed thickly, staring up at the ceiling.

"So, um, I was thinking we probably need a name for the dog."

"You are planning to keep it?"

Will furrowed his brow and looked at Hannibal. "Of course." He expected Hannibal to protest. To argue. To forbid him to keep the animal in his home, but he didn't.

Instead, Hannibal simply smiled and said, "What did you have in mind?"

Will's muscles relaxed a bit. "I was thinking something wintry. Snowball seems too on the nose, though."

Hannibal made a humming sound low in his throat. His eyes wandered away from Will's face and he looked deep in thought.

"Frosty? Icicle? Flurry? Blizzard?" Will shook his head. Nothing seemed right. "Snowy? Whitey? I don't know."

"Inverno," Hannibal said after several moments of silence.

"What?"

"It's Italian."

"What does it mean?"

"Winter."

"Inverno," Will said, trying it out. "I think I like it."

Hannibal smiled.

Will returned the gesture. "Inverno, it is."

Three weeks had passed since the first night that Will had slept in Hannibal's bed. *Their* bed. Will had played by the rules, Hannibal had kept his promise about not feeding him longpig – at least to Will's knowledge – and Hannibal had continued to allow Will to roam about the house as he so chose. Much to Will's relief, he hadn't seen the inside of the guest bedroom or that damn chain again.

It was late Friday afternoon and Will was relaxing with the dog on the chaise lounge in Hannibal's study. Hannibal had taken Inverno to the vet the day after Will had rescued him, just as he said he would. He swung by after work and picked the dog up again, and Will had

waited anxiously by the door when the two of them returned home. Hannibal relayed the vet's diagnosis – a mild sprain in the dog's leg. It had been wrapped and the vet had said to try to keep him off of it as much as possible and it should heal completely in a few weeks. After three weeks, Inverno no longer sported a limp and seemed to be completely healed. Will was glad.

The dog had even followed him upstairs one night, but Hannibal had given a very disapproving look when Will had tried to bring Inverno into the bedroom. Will half hoped that the dog would spend the night whimpering outside the door, making Hannibal feel guilty and obligated to let him in, but he hadn't. And when Will got up in the morning, the dog was instead, back downstairs, curled up in front of the chaise lounge in Hannibal's study.

The dog had taken to the nighttime routine, curling up in his usual spot when Will and Hannibal went upstairs to bed. But during the day, Inverno followed Will around, much to his delight. He had kindly asked Hannibal to pick up some things for the dog a few days earlier and was pleased when the doctor had come home the same day with some treats and toys and a plush dog bed. He had even gotten a collar and leash, allowing Will to take Inverno for short daily walks around the yard and in the woods, as long as the dog was up for it. Will certainly missed his other dogs, but he was glad to have a canine companion once again.

Now, as Will read a book about Florentine history from Hannibal's shelf, Inverno was curled up beside him, resting with his chin on his paws. Will reached over and scratched behind his ears, receiving a grateful lick from the pup.

Will heard the familiar crunch of gravel beneath tires and knew Hannibal was home. A few minutes later the study door opened and Will looked up as Hannibal walked in.

The doctor smiled. "Good afternoon, Will."

"Hey, you're home early."

Hannibal's eyes came to a rest on the dog. He hesitated and then said, "My final patient of the day canceled."

Will looked down at the dog who was still curled up with his eyes open. Then he looked up at Hannibal again who continued to stare. "What?" Will asked.

"Please make him get down."

Will frowned. "He's comfortable."

Hannibal re-directed his stare to Will, his gaze stern and disapproving.

"Fine." Will closed the book and set it aside, then picked the dog up and gently set him down in his bed at the end of the lounge. "Better?"

"Much. Thank you." Hannibal walked to the closet and opened it. He rummaged briefly and then came out with a device that resembled a fancy-looking dust-buster. He walked over to the lounge and flipped a switch on the tiny vacuum which whirred to life. Inverno jumped

slightly but then settled again. Hannibal sucked up the stray dog hairs from the upholstery and then turned off the machine and returned it to the closet.

Will smirked. "You really don't like dogs."

"The dog is fine. I do not, however, enjoy dog hair on my furniture."

"But you can eat people," Will mumbled.

Hannibal fixed him with another stare and Will looked away.

"How was your day?" Hannibal asked after a few seconds.

"Fine."

Hannibal stood on the rug in front of Will, hands clasped in front of him. "Did you eat the food I left for you?"

"Yes."

"All of it?" His tone was parental, ready to reprimand if he didn't hear what he wanted.

"Most."

When Hannibal said nothing, Will glanced up to see the doctor tilt his head and offer an admonishing look.

"What? It's not my fault. You cook too much food. Your meals are difficult to finish for most normal people."

Hannibal smiled slightly and took a few steps forward, walking slowly around the side of the chaise lounge. Will didn't follow him with his eyes and wondered where he had gone until he felt the doctor's fingers in his hair.

"What are you doing?"

"You could use a trim."

"Don't even think about it."

"You would not like one?"

"No."

"Your hair has gotten very long." Hannibal's other hand was in his hair now, both weaving through the locks.

Will shivered. "You don't like it?"

"I do. I thought I would offer, however, in case you wanted a trim."

“Oh. Well, I don’t.”

“I see.”

Hannibal removed his hands from Will’s hair, and the latter found himself leaning his head back in search of the touch.

“I am in need of a shower,” Hannibal said. “And then I will start dinner.” He walked around the other end of the chaise lounge and into view, completing his circle around Will.

“Okay. I, uh, was thinking about going for a walk.”

“With the dog?”

Will glanced down at Inverno who was fast asleep in his bed. “By myself.” He looked at Hannibal who stared back only a moment before nodding once.

“I will see you in a little while, then.”

“All right.”

Hannibal turned and left the room. Will got to his feet and returned Hannibal’s book to its spot on the shelf. Then he gave Inverno a gentle pat so as not to wake him before he left the study. He retrieved his jacket from the coat rack and slipped it on as he went out the front door.

Will checked his watch as he left. It was almost four. He leisurely walked across the field that stretched out in front of Hannibal’s house.

The last time he had crossed the field was not a pleasant memory. He glanced towards the trees he had run for before. The trees wherein Hannibal had caught him and nearly choked him before allowing Will to walk back to the house on his own. Will glanced over his shoulder, back towards the house. He had gained a lot of trust since that moment. He looked back towards the trees. He knew the nearest neighbors weren’t very close but wondered just how long it would take to reach them.

It was more curiosity than anything else. He didn’t want to run. At least, he didn’t want to run to them. He would prefer to come and go as he pleased. He would prefer to resume his old life and have things return to some semblance of normalcy. He had never had a lot of friends, but he considered Alana to be one. And he missed her. He missed talking to her. Hell, he even missed the awkwardness that had developed between them recently.

And, strangely, a part of him even missed Jack. The man was insufferable and had tunnel vision when it came to cases. He even seemed a bit heartless at times, putting the case before everything – and everyone – else. But, somehow, Will missed it. He didn’t miss being forced to look at dead bodies. But he missed his old life. The routine. The way he felt when he helped solve a case. He wanted to go back to that. But he didn’t know how.

He didn’t know what Hannibal was planning. He had said Will’s confinement to the chain in the guest bedroom wouldn’t be permanent and he had been telling the truth. But was Will’s

imprisonment to the house permanent? He hadn't thought to ask that. Would Hannibal ever trust him enough to allow him to return to his old life? He wasn't sure, but he hoped so. He would have to ask Hannibal at some point, once he had worked up enough courage to hear the answer.

Will wandered towards the tree line, several yards north of the direction he had run before. Most of the snow had melted and there remained only a thin layer, interrupted sporadically by patches of dead grass. Will entered the trees and wandered in until he could no longer see the field or the house in the distance. Then he turned and walked through the woods, parallel to the tree line. When he checked his watch again, thirty minutes had passed. He turned and wound his way through the trees until he broke through the tree line. He had made his way back towards the house and was now even with the north side of it as he re-entered the yard. He crossed the side yard and as he rounded the corner for the front door, he noticed a delivery truck parked in the drive. As he crossed the front yard, he saw that the driver was nearly to the front door.

"Hey," Will called and the man turned.

"Good afternoon. Do you live here?"

"I do," Will answered.

"I've got a package I need a signature for."

"Great," Will said. He approached and noticed the medium-sized box in the man's hands. He signed for the package and then the man handed over the box.

"Thanks."

"Have a good evening," the man said.

Will nodded. "You too." As he walked to the front door, he looked the package over, wondering what Hannibal could have ordered. He went into the house and set the package on the floor as he removed his jacket. He heard padding down the stairs and turned to see Hannibal round the banister. He was dressed in a red sweater and trousers, his hair damp.

"Did you just get out of the shower? That was long."

"I worked out for a few minutes beforehand." Hannibal stopped a few feet away and then asked, "What is that?"

"Oh." Will hung his jacket on the coat rack. "Worked out? Doing what?"

"What is that, Will?"

Will looked at him and noticed his gaze was not on Will but much lower. Will followed it to the package on the floor. "It's for you."

"Was it on the porch?"

"No, it was just delivered."

Hannibal's attention snapped up to Will's face. "The delivery man was just here?"

"Yes. I signed for it."

Hannibal hurried forward. He stopped at the armoire against the wall, opened it, rummaged inside and then came out with a needle in hand. He closed the cabinet and turned towards the door. Will jumped as the doctor rushed towards him.

"What?"

"Step aside, Will."

"What are you—" Realization struck Will all of a sudden and he gasped quietly. "No, Hannibal!" He put his back against the door as Hannibal reached for the handle.

"Will, move."

"No!"

Hannibal shoved Will aside and opened the door. Will stumbled and then caught his balance, lunging at Hannibal before he made it through the door. He grabbed the doctor from behind, trying to wrap him in a bear hug. But Hannibal was much stronger. He maneuvered out of Will's grasp and spun around, pushing Will against the wall and pinning him there with a strong forearm across his chest. Will didn't mind the confinement. The longer Hannibal stayed to deal with Will, the more time the delivery man had to get away.

"You are trying my patience," Hannibal growled.

"You don't need to go after him. He doesn't even know me!"

"I cannot risk that." He let go of Will and moved for the door again.

"No, Hannibal, don't." Will grabbed the doctor's arm with both hands and held on tightly.

Hannibal set dangerous eyes on him. "Let go now, Will. This is your only warning."

But Will couldn't seem to allow himself to comply. As Hannibal tried to pull away from him, Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal's waist and tugged him backwards. They were both knocked off balance but Hannibal caught himself against the wall as Will tumbled to the floor.

Will scrambled to his feet and went to the door, shoving it closed and positioning himself in front of it. Hannibal didn't rush towards him. Instead, he stared at Will with a look the latter had never seen before. It was frightening. Predatory. Deadly. Will knew he had crossed a line and his stomach seized.

Hannibal still had the syringe in hand and tucked it in his pants pocket. Then he stalked towards Will and the younger man tensed.

"Please, Hannibal," Will said quietly. "You don't need to kill him."

He expected an argument from Hannibal, but the doctor said nothing. He continued his advance and then at the last moment, he lunged at Will who was caught off guard. He tried to dart out of the way but Hannibal was too fast. The doctor caught him with an arm around his neck, in an action Will was beginning to think was his subduing move of choice. The hold was tight and Will found it difficult to breathe. He pawed at Hannibal's arm but the doctor wouldn't let go. He waited for Hannibal to offer him a choice like he had before, but the stronger man said nothing. He increased the pressure on Will's neck and Will panicked, clawing furiously at Hannibal's arm. Bright spots began to dance in front of Will's eyes and his head felt light and dizzy. He tried to cry Hannibal's name, but his throat was too constricted to speak. A few moments later, his vision went dark.

Will awoke to a pounding headache. He opened his eyes and glanced around. The room was familiar. Too damn familiar. He sat up in the bed, his eyes darting around the guest bedroom.

"No," he whispered. He panted and climbed out of bed, feeling a familiar sensation around his ankle. "No!" He dropped to the floor, pulled up his pant leg and noticed for the first time that his shoes had been removed. He clawed at the ankle cuff, yanking and pulling until his muscles were sore. "Hannibal!"

He didn't wait for the doctor to arrive. He scrambled to his feet and ran into the bathroom. He glanced around the room and then started rummaging through the cabinet and drawers beneath the sink. He found nothing of use. He glanced into the mirror. His eyelids were heavy and he was covered in a sheen of sweat, his hair matted to his forehead.

His mind flitted back to the hallucination he had had where he had broken the window and stabbed Hannibal. He put his fist into the mirror, his knuckles stinging from the glass as it rained down into the sink. He snatched the towel from the rack and used it to pick up a shard of glass. He sank to the tile floor and leaned back against the door, pulling up his pant leg and using the piece of glass to saw at the edge of the leather ankle cuff. Every few strokes, the glass would slip and he'd let out a moan as he nicked his skin. But he kept sawing.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice came from the guest bedroom.

Will continued to slice at the cuff, desperate. He checked his progress and only found a slight indentation in the leather. "Come on," he growled.

"Will? Are you okay?"

"Come on, come on, come on." He sawed faster, his arm growing tired from the frantic action.

Hannibal knocked at the bathroom door. "Will?"

Will nicked his leg again and yelped. Blood trickled down the side of his foot.

"Will, I'm coming in."

“No,” Will groaned. He felt the door gently push against his back.

“Will, let me in.” When Will didn’t move or speak, Hannibal barked, “Will! What are you doing?”

Will felt the door against his back again.

“Please, move away from the door.”

When he didn’t comply, the door pressed harder into his back. He scooted away as it began to hurt. A moment later, Hannibal appeared around the door which was open just enough for him to squeeze through.

“Will,” Hannibal said. “Stop.”

Will noticed the impression in the leather growing deeper. He sawed more ferociously.

“Will, stop!”

When Hannibal stepped closer, Will turned towards him but backed away until he slammed into the edge of the bathtub. The ankle cuff pulled at his foot as the chain reached the edge of its boundary. Hannibal approached and Will clutched the shard of glass out in front of him, his mind flashing back to the hallucination where he had plunged the shard into Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal stopped. “Is this what you want to do?”

Will panted, his chest aching. His vision was blurred and his eyes burned with tears. “I...I can’t stay in here anymore!”

“Will, you have only been in here for thirty minutes. You slept most of it.”

“That’s not what I mean.” His voice trembled.

“Will,” Hannibal started, crouching down in front of him but still out of arm’s reach. “I did not intend to keep you in here this time.”

“What?”

“I put you in here while I was going after the delivery man, in case you woke up and decided to try to stop me again.”

“So, you’re going to let me out?”

Hannibal eyed the shard in Will’s hand and then Will’s bloody ankle. “I was.”

“No, Hannibal, please!”

Will scrambled towards him and Hannibal quickly dodged to the side and then grabbed a hold of Will from behind, gripping both of his wrists tightly.

“Stop, my love.”

“I-I wasn’t coming after you.” Will panted heavily, finding it difficult to breathe. Or focus. His head spun and hurt, and his entire body felt flushed.

“Drop the glass, dear Will.”

Will immediately opened his hand and let the towel-wrapped shard fall to the floor. His body was heavy and sore, and he suddenly felt dizzy. “Hannibal,” he muttered and then he felt his body droop forward before being restrained by Hannibal’s arms.

“Just breathe,” Hannibal said, but his voice was distant and muffled.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. :D As per usual, feel free to leave comments!

A Suitable Scheme

Chapter Summary

Hannibal humors Will by allowing him time to devise a plan to save the delivery man.

Chapter Notes

Here's the next chapter (finally, I know)!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will couldn't see anything. He felt the pressure of the bathroom tile against his knees and then he was weightless. He felt as if he were floating and then moments later, he came to a rest.

When he opened his eyes again, he had no idea how much time had passed. He blinked away the fuzziness. He felt too weak to run or fight or try to free himself. He felt too weak to move. He caught movement to his left and turned his head to see Hannibal seated on the edge of the bed. Will felt pressure around his wrist and thought Hannibal was restraining him.

"No," Will muttered. It came out no more than a whisper. He tried to pull his arm away but Hannibal held on tightly.

"I am taking your pulse, Will. Please, stop."

Will stopped pulling and relaxed, letting his eyes drift shut until Hannibal spoke again.

"I'm going to check your eyes." He retrieved a pen light from the bedside table and shined it in Will's eyes.

The light was too bright and Will closed his eyes until Hannibal prompted him to open them again. Hannibal finished and then fidgeted on the bed with something Will couldn't see from his position. A moment later Hannibal was messing with his wrist again. Will looked over to see the doctor wrapping a black cuff around it.

"No," Will growled, louder than the last time. "Hannibal." He tried to yank his arm free but the doctor had a firm grip.

"Shh, it's all right. I'm taking your blood pressure."

Will tried to relax again, his head throbbing. The blood pressure cuff tightened around his wrist as it inflated. He started to drape his free arm over his eyes but felt a stinging in his hand. He held it out to look at it. His hand was wrapped in gauze around the knuckles, and Will could see a hint of red through the material.

“The bleeding has stopped now but it needs proper attention. I will tend to that and your ankle when I have finished here.”

Will moved his leg. He felt the sharp pain of the cuts he had inflicted while trying to saw through the cuff. He still felt the pressure of the ankle cuff but wasn't sure if it was actually there or not.

“How are you feeling, Will?”

“I don't know. What happened?”

“You fainted.”

“Oh. Why?”

Hannibal looked at him. “You have a fever.” The pressure from the wrist cuff lessened. “Your blood pressure and pulse are both high but not dangerously so.”

“So it's not bad?”

“It is to be expected. You were very agitated.”

“Is the cuff still on?”

“I am removing it now.”

Will watched as Hannibal removed the blood pressure cuff. “I mean the other one.”

“No. I took it off to examine and wrap your cuts.”

“Are you going to put it back on?”

“Do I need to?” Hannibal looked at him.

Will shook his head.

Hannibal set the blood pressure cuff aside and turned his body on the bed to face Will.

“I need to treat your wounds. Do you think you can come sit in the bathroom?”

Will nodded and started to sit up.

Hannibal gently but firmly grasped Will's bicep with one hand while bracing the other against his back to help him up.

Will groaned and squeezed his eyes closed.

“How are you feeling?”

“A little lightheaded.”

“Would you like to lie back down?”

Will shook his head and then opened his eyes. “I’m all right. Just give me a minute.” He glanced down at his ankle and noticed his injured one was no longer wrapped in the cuff but rather white gauze that matched that around his knuckles. “How bad is it?”

“It’s not bad.”

“Good.”

“I am concerned for you, however.”

Will looked at the doctor who still had his hands on him. “Why?”

“You were willing to hurt yourself in order to escape.”

“That wasn’t my intention.”

“Nevertheless, you did hurt yourself and you were willing to continue doing so.”

“You clearly have never been held captive before.”

“Will.”

“I was scared, Hannibal. I thought you were locking me up again. I thought you thought I had betrayed you, and I was afraid you wouldn’t set me free again.”

Hannibal rubbed Will’s back slowly. “If you had had a little patience, you would have found out that that was not the case.”

“Right,” Will mumbled. “It’s a little difficult to have patience when you’re locked up against your will.”

“Let’s not do this, love.”

“Fine.” Will sighed. “I think I’m feeling a little better now. I can probably get up.”

Hannibal stood up but kept a hold of Will’s arm as the latter got to his feet. Will’s shirt clung to his back with sweat and he tugged at the hem to peel the fabric away from his skin. Then he slowly walked towards the bathroom, Hannibal guiding him as he went. The doctor had him sit on the closed toilet lid and Will noticed that the glass from the mirror had been cleaned up.

How long was I out?

“Nearly thirty minutes.”

Will started, not realizing he had asked the question aloud.

“And you cleaned up the glass before checking my vitals?” Will scoffed.

“On the contrary, dear Will.” Hannibal slowly removed the gauze from Will’s ankle. “You awoke to the second round. I had already checked your vitals once, as soon as you passed out.”

“Oh,” Will whispered, wincing from the pain in his ankle.

“Despite what you may believe, I do care very much for you.”

“Care very much,” Will repeated in a mumble.

Hannibal said nothing more about it, and Will thought the doctor seemed reluctant to elaborate on his feelings. He went to work cleaning Will’s ankle and knuckle wounds in a slow and deliberate manner. Will only winced a few times as the doctor applied antiseptic and more bandages.

“Are you hungry?” Hannibal asked when he finished.

Will had been too preoccupied with the fact that he was chained up again to even consider it before that moment. He ran through the events of the day in his mind and recalled that the last time he had eaten was around noon. “I could probably eat,” he said.

“Would you like me to bring it to you in the bedroom?”

“No,” Will answered quickly, leaning forward.

“Okay. Will you join me at the table?”

Will nodded, trying to keep his expression from looking desperate. The last thing he needed was for Hannibal to deem him too frantic or unstable to be allowed his freedom.

Hannibal stood up from his crouching position and held out his hand. Will placed his hand in the doctor’s and let Hannibal lead him out of the bathroom and guest bedroom. When they arrived at the bottom of the steps, Inverno trotted over. Will stopped and picked up the dog, holding it tightly against his chest.

“Dinner should be nearly ready. Please, meet me in the dining room.”

When Will nodded, Hannibal left him and the dog and disappeared into the dining room. Will glanced towards the front door, his stomach seizing as he recalled his last memory there. He had been so worried for his own freedom that he hadn’t yet considered the fate of the delivery man.

Will sat down on the next to last step and leaned against the banister, holding Inverno as tightly as he could without hurting him. The dog settled in his arms, content to be held. Will sat there until he heard Hannibal call his name several minutes later. He stood and carried the

dog into the dining room where Hannibal was setting a meat-heavy platter down in the center of the table.

Hannibal looked up and offered a gentle smile. "Please put the dog down and wash your hands. Dinner is ready."

Will did as instructed, returning to the dining room a couple minutes later. He took his seat and watched as Hannibal carved the chunk of meat in front of him. Then the doctor carefully laid a large slice in the middle of Will's plate which was already beautifully arranged with various small fruits and vegetables, some of which Will didn't even recognize. Hannibal plated his own large helping of meat and then took his seat across from Will.

Will stared at the platter between them. The chunk of meat in front of him morphed, taking the shape of various human body parts. Will thought about the delivery man. He wasn't hungry anymore.

Hannibal noticed Will's eyes on the platter between them. The younger man had not so much as touched his fork, let alone taken a bite of the meal in front of him. Hannibal didn't need to guess why.

"Will, I promised I would not feed you human. I have not broken that promise."

Will's eyes snapped up to meet Hannibal's. There was relief in them but also remnants of the wide-eyed, feral look he had had when Hannibal had forced his way into the bathroom to find Will frantically cutting at his restraints.

"What did you do with him?" Will asked. His voice was quiet and raspy.

"Will—"

He raised his voice and asked again, "What did you do with him, Hannibal?"

"Will, he saw you."

"So?"

"He saw your face. He could identify you."

"He doesn't even know me."

"Your photo has been on the news."

Will's eyebrows shot up at that. "Really?"

"Of course. What did you expect? You are considered a missing person."

"I-I don't know. I hadn't given that much thought."

Hannibal cut a piece of meat and brought it to his lips. He chewed the tender, juicy bit of pork, letting the succulent flavor coat every taste bud.

“What did you do with him?” Will repeated.

“He was a threat.”

“Was?”

Hannibal saw the concern in Will’s eyes. The worry for the man. The disgust for Hannibal. He ignored the rare indigestion that crept up inside of him. “He could have identified you and brought the FBI to our door.”

“So you killed him.”

Hannibal didn’t reply.

“You didn’t need to kill him, Hannibal. He didn’t do anything to deserve that!”

“You are right. His fate has been determined by a set of unfortunate circumstances.”

Will leaned forward and put his elbows on the table, burying his face in his hands above his untouched plate.

“Will, you need to eat something.”

“I’m not hungry,” he mumbled into his palms.

“We had a deal.”

“You and your deals.” Will dropped his hands and scowled.

“It is pork on your plate. I have kept up my end of the agreement. It is time for you to keep up yours by eating.”

“Fuck, Hannibal. How can you expect me to eat?”

Hannibal held back the exasperated sigh bubbling in his chest. He continued eating but kept his main focus on Will.

“You attacked me, put me in a fucking sleeper hold until I passed out, locked me up again and then killed a man for nothing more than having seen my face. What the hell is wrong with you?”

Hannibal tilted his head. He fixed Will with his most admonishing stare but only because he wanted to mask the sting he felt. They had made such great progress lately and now it seemed as though it was all unraveling.

“I apologize for hurting you.”

Will exhaled and looked away, sitting back in his chair. “You are an animal.”

“Animals kill all the time.”

“Not for sport.”

“You are not concerned about my sport. You are concerned about the man from this afternoon. The man who was a threat.” He paused and then added, “Animals kill when they feel threatened. When they feel their livelihood may be taken from them. Animals are killers by nature.”

“*You* are the threat! You are the predator. The stalker. The one who kills on a whim.”

“Never on a whim.”

Will let out a growl that sounded less predatory than frustrated. He pushed his chair back from the table and got to his feet.

“Will.”

“What?” he snapped.

“Sit down and eat.”

Will breathed heavily and Hannibal noticed a light sheen of sweat on his forehead. He most likely still had a fever.

“Please,” Hannibal prodded.

“Why?” Will fidgeted and paced. “Why would I do that? What could you possibly say that would make me want to stay?”

Hannibal hesitated only a moment before speaking. He kept his tone calm and even as he said, “I did not kill the man.”

Will stopped and turned his head to look at Hannibal. “What?”

Hannibal didn’t repeat himself. He knew Will had heard him.

“What do you mean?” Will walked to the edge of the table and leaned down, bracing his hands against it. “But you...you said you...”

“I never said I killed him. You are the one who assumed that.”

“Where is he?”

“In the basement.”

Will’s eyebrows skyrocketed. He glanced towards the doorway, the closest path to the basement door. “And...he’s alive?”

“He is.” Hannibal took another bite and swallowed. “For now.”

“What are you going to do with him? Are you going to kill him?”

“I am afraid he poses too much of a threat.”

“No,” Will said, taking his seat again. “Let me come up with a solution.”

Hannibal tilted his head, offering a wry smile. “What would you propose?”

“I don’t know yet. Give me a little time to figure something out.”

“How long?”

“The weekend.”

Hannibal stared at Will for several moments. The man was leaned forward in his chair, eyes wide and hopeful. The delivery man was securely chained in the basement and wouldn’t be going anywhere without Hannibal’s permission. Hannibal decided to humor Will. “The weekend,” he agreed.

Will exhaled heavily and smiled, relief washing over his face.

“However, if you do not come up with a solution I find suitable—”

“I know. I will, though.”

Hannibal had his doubts but he was willing to let the man try. Despite so many of his actions having angered or hurt or confused Will lately, Hannibal did want to please him. He decided it wouldn’t hurt to at least allow him the opportunity to come up with a solution.

“I have to say, I’m a little surprised.”

“By what, dear Will?”

“You. I can’t believe you didn’t just kill him.”

Hannibal put another bite to his mouth, taking his time to chew and swallow. “This was not something I had planned out, and these kinds of things should not be performed hastily.”

“I suppose not,” Will murmured. He picked up his knife and fork, cut a corner of the meat and took a bite.

Hannibal smiled.

Will awoke with a start. He was surprised for only a moment when he saw the dark room around him instead of the feathered stag that had just been in front of him. He glanced to the side and saw Hannibal on his back, still asleep.

Will turned back and stared up at the ceiling. His mind went to the man in the basement. The poor, innocent delivery man who had done nothing wrong. Nothing but see the face of a man

who had been held against his will for weeks on end. *He shouldn't have to die for that*, Will thought.

Will had been wracking his brain all night, trying to come up with a plan that he thought might be suitable to Hannibal. He had only been able to come up with one plan and it had been right before he had fallen asleep. Hannibal was already out by that point and Will hadn't wanted to wake him. But his own sleep had been restless and short-lived. He needed to know whether or not Hannibal would go for it.

He turned to face Hannibal and propped up on an elbow. He reached out and gently touched the doctor's arm, a pang of nerves wringing his stomach. It wasn't the first time he had woken in the night and roused Hannibal as well. But it was certainly the most complicated.

The doctor immediately stirred. His hand launched out and grabbed a hold of Will's wrist. The grip was tight but not uncomfortable, and Will didn't try to pull away. Hannibal opened his eyes a moment later and looked at Will. His grip loosened.

"What's wrong?" Hannibal asked, his voice deep and gravelly with sleep.

"I wanted to talk about the delivery man."

"What about him would you like to discuss?"

"Did he see you? When you took him, I mean."

"No."

Will raised a brow. "Really?"

"Did you come up with an idea, Will?"

"Yes. And it should work. I mean, he didn't see your face so he would have no way of identifying you." He paused and when Hannibal said nothing, he continued. "Why don't we just blindfold him and take him back home? If he doesn't know it was you who took him, he won't be able to bring the police to us."

Will waited for a response, but Hannibal said nothing. He squinted in the darkness and could see that Hannibal's eyes were still open. The doctor stared up at the ceiling.

"What do you think?"

"I think that he still saw you. If he recognized you, it won't matter that he didn't see me. We are in the same place we have been."

Will frowned. "Hannibal, you can't kill him."

"I have given you the weekend, Will. You must come up with a suitable plan before Monday morning."

Will rolled onto his back, sighing heavily.

“This plan will not suffice,” Hannibal added, as though Will hadn’t deduced that. “If you do not come up with an idea that I find suitable, I will have no choice but to continue with my original plan.”

“I have a feeling you won’t find any plan I propose to be suitable.”

“That may be true.” He paused and then said, “However, if I am forced to follow through with my plan, I promise I will make it as quick and painless as I can.” The doctor turned onto his side, reaching out and brushing his fingers along Will’s cheek. “The man has done nothing to warrant suffering.”

Will said nothing. He knew Hannibal was trying to make him feel better, but Will wasn’t sure anything could make him feel better about his once-lover murdering a completely innocent person. Hannibal removed his hand from Will’s cheek and resumed his sleeping position. Will waited a few minutes and then looked over. The doctor’s eyes were closed, but Will doubted he was asleep yet.

Will sighed and sat up. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and got to his feet.

“Where are you going?” the doctor asked.

“I need a walk.”

“William,” Hannibal said and the warning in his voice was clear.

“Rules. I know. I don’t plan to break them.”

He waited a few moments but when Hannibal said nothing more, Will left the room. He went downstairs and found his way to the basement door. He didn’t try the door handle because there was a metal latch above it that was secured with a padlock. He had no idea where the key was. His only way in would be to break down the door, and that wasn’t something he could do without the doctor hearing it.

He left the basement door and wandered into the doctor’s study where he found Inverno curled up in his bed. When he plopped down on the chaise lounge, the dog stirred. He stood up in his bed and stretched and then walked over to Will, standing up with his front feet on Will’s knees. Will picked him up and put the dog on his lap. Inverno settled down and rested his chin on his paws. Will scratched behind his ears.

“I hope you don’t feel like a prisoner here,” he said to the dog. “Because I’m not sure we’ll ever be able to leave.”

Will had to do something. The thought of allowing Hannibal to kill the man in the basement was not something he felt he could live with. If he couldn’t come up with a plan that was suitable to Hannibal, he would have to take matters into his own hands. He was no match for the doctor physically. He knew whatever he planned would have to be cunning.

The next day, Will and Hannibal spent the majority of day in silence. Will was wracking his brain to come up with a solution that the doctor might find suitable, but every possibility that crossed his mind found itself with countless holes poked through once he presented it to the doctor. And when he wasn't having his ideas shot down by Hannibal, he was quietly trying to come up with a new one. But as the doctor started on dinner that evening, Will came to a realization – logic and planning were not going to win Hannibal over. In fact, he knew nothing would win him over.

Will sat in the study with Inverno on his lap. He sighed, knowing what he had to do. He wasn't surprised. A part of him had known it all along – no plan would ever be good enough for Hannibal to agree to it. Will had to stop thinking like himself. He had to start thinking like Hannibal. Calculating, manipulative Hannibal.

Will set Inverno down on the floor and stood up. He walked to the study door he had left ajar and slipped through, quietly pulling it closed behind him. Inverno whimpered from the other side and Will cringed. Since taking in the dog, Will had always let it follow him around throughout the day. The only times they were apart was when one of them slept. He walked away from the door and headed towards the kitchen, hoping Hannibal wouldn't hear the dog and come looking, wondering why it was crying.

Will stopped at the end of the hallway, right outside of the dining room. Hannibal would certainly think it was strange if Will showed up without the dog at his heels. He would immediately know something was up. Will turned around and walked back to the study. As soon as he opened the door, Inverno dashed through. He skidded to a halt when he realized that Will was right in front of him. Will bent down and picked him up.

"If you want to get out of here," Will whispered, "be cool." He scratched behind the dog's ears and then headed for the kitchen again.

When he walked into the room, his nose was struck with the scent of raw meat and herbs. The doctor was behind the island counter, clad in a navy waistcoat and trousers, with the white sleeves of his dress shirt rolled up to his elbows. As he firmly pressed and packed the meat in front of him, the muscles of his forearms flexed and moved beneath the skin, and Will chastised himself for watching as long as he did.

"Did you come up with a new idea?" Hannibal asked, his tone even, almost dull, as though he were simply humoring Will. Will assumed he was.

"Not yet." He paused. "We were a little lonely," Will said and immediately regretted it when the doctor stilled his hands and looked up.

Hannibal's face was expressionless as he stared at Will. Will resisted the urge to swallow the lump forming in his throat. Instead, he turned around and walked to the plush chair in the corner of the room and sat down.

"Will, I would prefer it if you would not carry the dog into the kitchen."

"What?" Will said, letting Inverno settle on his lap. "Why?"

“Because food is being made in the kitchen and I have plenty of my own spices to use. I do not need the addition of dog hair.”

Will scratched behind the dog’s ears. “Is he fine like this?”

Hannibal gave him a long look but said nothing.

“Is he at least tolerable like this?”

“I would prefer him on the floor, away from my kitchen.”

Will smirked, realizing that the doctor may not have missed the dog at all if Will had left him in the study.

“Are you amused?”

Will lifted his eyebrows and nodded. “Definitely.” When the doctor resumed his work, Will added, “But you know, if you don’t want him in here, I can’t be in here either. Unless you want me to lock him in the other room.”

“That would be fine.”

“With his whining and whimpering and scratching at the door.”

Hannibal looked up at “scratching,” his eyes narrowed only slightly, but the threat was evident.

Will offered a wicked grin.

“You realize that my tolerance for hosting this animal has only been as such because it is so well-behaved.”

“He just wants to be near me. Would you rather I left the kitchen?”

“You are welcome in this kitchen any time.”

“Sans dog.”

“Just keep him on the floor, please.”

Will sighed and patted Inverno on the head. Then he set him on the floor. The dog stood in front of him, looking up at him. “He is very confused right now.”

“He will be fine.”

“It’s his fault,” Will whispered to the dog and looked pointedly at Hannibal. “Blame him.” Inverno stood up on his back legs with his front feet on Will’s knees. Will scratched under his chin. “I know. I think it’s pretty unfair too.”

“Perhaps he would be happier as an outdoor animal,” Hannibal said.

Will frowned and looked up. He was about to defend the dog's indoor privileges when he saw the corners of the doctor's mouth twitch upward as he worked. "Hilarious."

Hannibal looked at Will and his smile widened.

Will and Inverno hung out in the kitchen, watching Hannibal work for a few more minutes. Then, Will sat forward in the chair. The dog backed up and watched him. "I think we're going to go in the other room for a while."

"Okay," Hannibal said. He kept working on dinner but looked up at Will.

Will offered a smile that felt awkward on his face. He stood up and walked towards the dining room, hoping Hannibal couldn't read just how nervous he felt. He and Inverno left the room. Will wandered to the door to Hannibal's study that he had left open. Before he walked inside, he glanced over his shoulder. There was no sign of Hannibal. It didn't look as though he had followed him.

Will backed away from the study door and turned around. He slowly walked towards the front door but stopped when he reached the armoire in the entryway. He looked over his shoulder again, acid burning in his stomach. Inverno was at his feet and he hoped the dog remained quiet so as not to draw attention to them. Will took a deep breath and pulled open both doors of the armoire.

He worked quickly. He knew Hannibal had retrieved a syringe from inside the cabinet the day he had gone after the delivery man. Will hoped there was another one inside. There were mostly linens lining the shelves of the armoire, but Will's attention was drawn to the black leather medical bag at waist level. He pulled it open and rummaged inside. He found a syringe and a small vial of serum that was more than half empty. He read the label, recognizing the name as a tranquilizer. He pulled the syringe cap off and set it beside the bag. Then he stabbed the needle through the top of the vial and filled the syringe with what remained of the serum. He hoped it would be enough for what he needed. He re-capped the syringe and stuffed it into the pocket of his jeans. He debated taking the empty vial but decided against it. He would have to dispose of it but had nowhere to do that where the doctor wouldn't possibly find it. He dropped the empty vial back into the bag and closed it up. Then he closed the armoire doors, glancing towards the doorway to the dining room. There was still no sign of Hannibal, and he let out the breath he hadn't realized he had been holding.

He needed to hide the syringe. He debated keeping it on himself but decided against it. Hannibal had promised not to kiss Will again without the latter's permission, but that didn't mean he wouldn't try to initiate contact. Will felt uneasy about the possibility of Hannibal somehow finding the syringe on him. He had to get rid of it.

He turned around and headed for the stairs, Inverno at his heels. He had taken only a couple of steps before the doctor appeared in the doorway. Will forced his feet to keep moving, fighting the urge to stop abruptly. He wondered how much the doctor had seen or heard as he tried to calm his racing heart.

“Hey,” Will said before Hannibal could say a word. He thought initiating the conversation would make him seem less guilty.

Hannibal glanced over Will’s shoulder in the direction from which he had come. The only things behind him were the armoire and the front door. He hadn’t yet reached the study door. The possibilities of what he had been doing moments before were limited. Will’s throat went dry and he resisted the urge to swallow as he stopped a few feet in front of the doctor. Hannibal tilted his head slightly, looking at Will with curious eyes.

“What?” Will asked, furrowing his brow.

“What are you two up to?”

“Up to? We were going to go for a walk, but I forgot his leash.”

Hannibal made a low humming noise deep in his throat. Will knew he was suspicious.

“I typically let my dogs run free at home.” He glanced down at Inverno who sat by his feet. “I forgot I can’t do that with this guy. I need to get his leash.”

Hannibal stared at him for what seemed like several minutes but was probably only a couple of seconds.

Will lifted his eyebrows. “Did you need me for something?”

“No. Enjoy your walk.”

Will smiled. “We won’t be long.” He moved past the doctor and changed course. Instead of going upstairs as originally planned, he went to the closet at the end of the hall. He found Inverno’s leash inside and then knelt down to attach it to the dog’s collar. He glanced up in time to see Hannibal disappear into his study, leaving the door open. Will closed the closet door and then led Inverno to the front door. Will grabbed his jacket from the coat rack and slipped it on, and then he took Inverno outside for a walk.

It hadn’t been his plan. But he had had to come up with some sort of excuse for why he had been by the front door. It was the quickest and most likely scenario his brain had conjured up. And once he had told Hannibal, he couldn’t very well have changed his mind without the doctor becoming more suspicious than he already was. So he had had to follow through with his lie.

He had said, though, that they wouldn’t be long. And he meant it. He needed to get back into the house and hide the syringe. He hoped to time it so that Hannibal would be in the kitchen again. In his quest to fill Will out – which had been going surprisingly well in Hannibal’s very vocal opinion – the doctor had made sure to fix some kind of rich, fattening dessert each night. Generally, he started on it before their dinner had finished cooking. That way, the dessert could be in the oven as they ate dinner. Will hoped to return to the house and catch Hannibal busy in the kitchen again. That would be his last opportunity to hide the syringe before the end of the night.

He checked his watch as Inverno tugged on the leash. The dog seemed well-behaved for the most part but when outside, he was eager to explore. Will would have to start teaching him how to behave on a leash. But for now, he followed the dog, letting him explore at will. They wandered around the yard, Inverno sniffing at and marking nearly every single object and patch of grass they passed, while Will anxiously waited to get back into the house. He checked his watch every few minutes and when it hit the twenty-minute mark, he decided he had stalled long enough.

“Come on, buddy.” He tugged the leash lightly and the dog turned to follow him. They went back inside the house. Will hung up his jacket and removed the leash from Inverno’s collar. He walked across the entryway and when he was nearly to the closet door, he heard a voice behind him.

“That wasn’t long.”

“No,” Will said, glancing over his shoulder at the doctor. “I said it wouldn’t be.”

“So you did.”

Will opened the closet and returned the leash. When he closed the door and turned around, the doctor was much closer, only a few feet away. Will assumed a less guilty version of himself would find Hannibal’s hovering strange. He furrowed his brow, trying to look confused. “What?”

Hannibal held out a hand. “Come here.”

Will’s stomach tightened but he forced a small smile. He knew it looked awkward but he didn’t think that would seem suspicious. The doctor certainly knew awkwardness was nothing new for him. He took a few steps forward, feeling as though the syringe was burning a hole in his pants pocket. He was directly in front of Hannibal, a mere arm’s length away. The doctor lifted his hand and brushed the back of his fingers down Will’s cheek. Will took in a deep breath, letting it out in a quiet sigh. He looked down, away from Hannibal, in his first genuine reaction in the last half hour.

“I am glad we have gotten to this point,” Hannibal said, his voice unusually soft.

Will raised his head and met the doctor’s eyes. “What point is that?”

The corners of Hannibal’s mouth twitched. “Trust.”

Will looked at him a moment and then nodded gently. His nerves went into overdrive and he wondered if the doctor could smell it on him. He attempted to mask it with a small smile. “You did promise.”

Hannibal nodded once. His eyes were locked on Will’s and the latter thought he saw something knowing in them as the doctor inclined his head. “So did you.”

“Then I guess it’s great we both kept our promises.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed. “Breaking promises would not lead us anywhere good.”

Will nodded and lifted his eyebrows, trying to look as nonchalant and agreeable as he could. He wondered how convincing it was. Hannibal's eyes softened and he smiled. He lifted his hand to brush Will's cheek again, and Will could have sworn the doctor's gaze was on his lips. Will wetted them out of habit, but Hannibal didn't lean in. Will waited, but then Hannibal dropped his hand to his side, met his gaze and smiled.

"I will be in the kitchen. Dinner will be ready soon."

"Great," Will muttered as Hannibal turned and walked through the doorway to the dining room. Will watched him pass the table and enter the kitchen. When he had disappeared around the corner, Will exhaled. He glanced down at Inverno who was still at his side. Then he turned and went to the staircase.

Will's hands shook as he walked up the stairs. If he hadn't been convinced of Hannibal's suspicions, he certainly was now. He glanced down the stairs but saw no sign of the doctor. He had to find some place to hide the syringe before he was found out. He went into the master bedroom and closed the door. Inverno was still with him. Hannibal never allowed the dog into the room and Will thought about making him leave but was too afraid the dog would begin scratching or barking at the door. He couldn't risk the dog drawing attention to him.

Will walked around to his side of the bed and opened the drawer on the night stand. There were books, a pad of paper and a pencil. He put his hand to his pocket, feeling the syringe within. He couldn't leave it there. The spot was too obvious. If Hannibal checked the drawer at any time in the evening, his plan would be over. But even worse, Will would probably end up back in the guest bedroom with his ankle attached to a chain. No, he had to choose a much less obvious and accessible hiding spot.

He looked around the room but didn't know where to put it. He thought about hiding the syringe in his dresser drawer but, while Hannibal was not likely to rummage through Will's clothing, the latter couldn't risk it. If Hannibal was as suspicious as Will felt he was, the doctor might do a little digging just to make sure his suspicions were not founded.

Not only did he have to hide it somewhere Hannibal wouldn't look, but the syringe also had to be in a place where Will could get to it without the doctor noticing. Will sighed and shook his head. Even if he found a great hiding spot in the bedroom, he didn't know how he would be able to get up in the middle of the night and retrieve the syringe without Hannibal noticing. He couldn't hide it in the bedroom.

Will walked to the door and opened it. He stepped out into the hall and looked towards the stairs. Still no sign of Hannibal. He and Inverno crossed the hall to the bathroom and went in. Will locked the door behind them. He rummaged through cabinets and drawers beneath the sink but wasn't sure where he could put it. Again, if Hannibal were suspicious, he might check those places to make sure Will wasn't up to something. He sighed and leaned back against the door. Inverno pawed at his shin and then stood up on his hind legs, bracing his front feet against Will's thighs. Will stooped and lifted the dog.

"What are we going to do?" he whispered. He scratched behind the dog's ears and then turned to leave the bathroom. He opened the door and walked out into the hall. He glanced

around, looking for a hiding spot. He set the dog down as he moved to an ancient European shield on a display pedestal.

Something like this might work, he thought. It was certainly less obvious. If Hannibal were going to search for something, his décor probably wouldn't be the first place he'd investigate. Will leaned over and around the piece, looking for a spot to hide the syringe. It was too exposed, but his stomach fluttered and he knew he was on the right track. He stepped away from the shield and looked around the hallway and landing. He spotted a framed painting on the wall and he couldn't help the smile that formed on his lips. He hurried across the hall, glancing at the stairs again. When he was satisfied that Hannibal was not watching, he gently pulled the bottom of the frame away from the wall, holding his breath as though an alarm were going to sound like it would in a museum. When there was no alarm, he peered around to the back. He quickly dug in his pocket and retrieved the syringe. He delicately placed it on the back side of the frame and let the painting come to a rest against the wall.

He stepped back and eyed the painting, measuring it with his eyes to make sure it was still hanging evenly. When he was satisfied that he had covered his tracks, he turned and picked up Inverno again. He walked to the stairs and as he descended, Hannibal came into view. Will felt a lump form in his throat and resisted the urge to swallow.

"Dinner is ready," Hannibal said, watching Will as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Great. I'm starving."

Hannibal tilted his head and lifted his eyebrows. "Really?"

Will shrugged a shoulder. "I have a bit of my appetite back."

"That is wonderful to hear. Please, wash up and join me."

Will nodded and set Inverno down. The three of them went into the kitchen where Will washed his hands and Hannibal retrieved two plates from the counter. They both went to the dining room where Hannibal set Will's plate down in front of him and carried his own to his seat.

The two talked easily through dinner. Will brought up the delivery man only because he thought not doing so would make Hannibal even more suspicious. They ate dinner and Will fed Inverno a few bites under the table until he caught a glimpse of Hannibal's narrowed eyes. He smiled impishly to which Hannibal shook his head.

When they finished dinner, they went into Hannibal's study, where the doctor played a couple of Will's favorite songs on piano. When he finished, Inverno stayed put and the two men went upstairs for bed.

Will jolted awake. He breathed heavily, staring up at the ceiling as he waited for his pulse to slow. His neck and palms felt damp with sweat, but his shirt wasn't soaked through like a lot of nights. He reached up to the nightstand and felt the small flip phone Hannibal had given

him. He pulled it close and checked the time. It was early Sunday morning. Still dark. He wasn't surprised. He knew he would awaken in the night. He always did. And this particular night, he was counting on it.

He put the phone back and turned his head. Hannibal was on his back, one arm crooked beneath the pillow and his other hand resting on his bare stomach. His eyes were closed.

Will sat up and slowly swung his legs over the edge of the bed. He got to his feet and crept to the bedroom door. He watched Hannibal as he went but the doctor didn't stir. Will quietly turned the doorknob and slipped through. He didn't want to make any more noise than necessary so he pulled the door up without closing it.

He hurried across the hall to the painting. He glanced over his shoulder. The bedroom door hadn't moved. He turned back around and gently pulled the bottom of the painting away from the wall. He snatched the syringe from the ledge of the frame and tucked it into the pocket of his pajama pants. Then he let the painting rest against the wall. He glanced over his shoulder again. The door was still pulled up but a light came on, illuminating the slivers around the door.

Shit.

He ducked into the bathroom and quickly pushed the door up, turning the knob so it wouldn't make noise as it latched. Then he locked it and turned on the light. He didn't need to use the bathroom, so instead he walked to the sink and leaned against it. He breathed deeply, exhaling slowly, trying to get his heart rate and breathing to return to normal while he stalled before going back to the bedroom. Once he had calmed down, he flushed the toilet and washed his hands out of habit.

He put his palm against his pocket, feeling the syringe within. The acid in his stomach bubbled and he swallowed the lump in his throat. He left the needle alone and unlocked the door. He opened it and flicked off the light as he walked through. He hadn't reached the other side of the hallway before the bedroom door opened and Hannibal appeared in the doorway.

"Hey," Will said. He slowed but didn't stop, despite every instinct telling him to stay as far away from the doctor as he could. If Hannibal found the syringe, it would be game over for him.

He only came to a halt when he reached the doorway and couldn't get into the bedroom because Hannibal blocked his path.

"Are you all right?" the doctor asked evenly.

Will nodded. "Just had to use the bathroom."

Hannibal eyed him, looking him up and down. Will folded his arms over his chest.

"What?"

"You are sweaty."

Will shrugged. "I had a nightmare."

Hannibal frowned deeply, lines forming between his eyes.

"That's nothing new," Will muttered.

"I am aware. It is still worrisome, however."

"I'm fine," Will mumbled. When Hannibal made no move to let Will into the bedroom, the latter asked, "Can we go back to bed?"

Hannibal remained in place for a few seconds before nodding once and stepping aside, allowing Will just enough room to slip by him. Will's arm brushed against the doctor's as he passed, and a chill went up his spine. He kept walking, half expecting to be attacked from behind. But he didn't think Hannibal knew anything for sure. He hoped he wasn't underestimating the doctor.

Will reached his side of the bed without incident. He crawled into bed and lay down but left the blanket off, kicking it to the foot of the bed. Hannibal sauntered to his side of the bed and sat down. He turned enough so that he could see Will, and he watched him momentarily.

"What?" Will asked.

"I had hoped the addition of some of your freedom would help in chasing away your nightmares."

"I don't think it's the lack of freedom," Will muttered.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, there's a man in your basement who you intend to murder." Will put emphasis on the final word and even added a scoff afterwards, immediately regretting it as Hannibal fixed him with a stare. Will looked away.

"Will, I apologize that this is the way it has to be."

Will sighed and brought both hands up, scrubbing his palms over his face. "It doesn't have to be this way and you know it."

"Will."

"You won't even consider any of my ideas."

"I have considered each one equally."

"They are just not to your liking."

Hannibal said nothing.

Will sighed heavily. He hadn't meant to discuss it and he wasn't sure if it would hurt or help his plan in the long run. But at least it was true to what he was feeling. Hannibal wouldn't think that was strange.

"Will I need to chain you up again?"

"What?" Will's attention snapped to the doctor. He furrowed his brow, every muscle in his body feeling the urge to run. "No."

"I'm not telling you that I will do it. I'm simply asking if that is what will need to happen."

"Why would that need to happen? I haven't done anything."

"Will, if you do not come up with a satisfactory plan, you know what I will be forced to do. Are you going to allow that to happen, or will I need to lock you up for the duration of it?"

"Oh," Will uttered, breathing a small sigh. "I don't know."

Hannibal positioned himself on the bed so he leaned back against the headboard. "Will you try to stop me?"

"I don't know," Will repeated. "Maybe."

"Will, I cannot allow you to do that." Hannibal scooted down until he was on his side, propped up on an elbow and facing Will.

"Then, I guess you will do what you have to." Will refused to meet the doctor's eyes.

"It may be best to lock you up at the start, then."

Will sighed. He couldn't argue with the doctor. He didn't intend for it to get that far, but if his plan for the next few minutes didn't go as anticipated, he would be back on the chain anyway. And not just for the duration of Hannibal eliminating whatever threat he saw in the delivery man.

Hannibal reached over and gently placed his hand on Will's chest. Will tensed. Hannibal stilled his hand until Will's muscles began to relax and then he rubbed gently.

"Hannibal," Will whispered, still unable to look at the doctor.

"Yes?" His hand gradually moved downward until he was gently rubbing small circles on Will's stomach.

"I don't—I don't think this is a good idea." And he didn't. For more than one reason. The main one at the moment being that he had a syringe in his pocket – just inches from where Hannibal's hand was – that he was planning to use as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Hannibal stopped rubbing. Even out of the corner of his eye, Will could see the doctor looking at him. Will refused to meet his eyes. A moment later, Hannibal's hand was gone and

he rolled away. It was only when the doctor flicked off the bedside lamp that Will looked his direction.

“Are you...upset?”

“Of course not,” Hannibal said plainly. He settled on his back, both hands tucked beneath his head.

“Okay.”

“I am simply giving you the time and space you need.”

Will refrained from sighing. He felt a pang in his stomach that he couldn't explain. Or rather, that he didn't want to explain. He felt bad. He felt guilty. He didn't want the delivery man to die so he was doing what was necessary to stop that. But a part of him still felt that Hannibal cared about him – as convoluted as those feelings might be – and that confused him.

“Thanks,” Will muttered, not knowing what else to say.

Hannibal said nothing more and Will was content to lie in silence.

Will stared up at the ceiling, letting his eyes adjust to the dark. He thought about what was to come next. As he brushed his hand against his pocket, he focused on keeping his breathing light and rhythmic. He shifted on the bed, rolling onto the side with the syringe. If he were going to do it, he needed his movements to seem as ordinary as possible. He hoped if he tossed and turned a bit beforehand that Hannibal would think nothing of it when he finally moved to grab the syringe.

After a few minutes, he rolled onto his back again, letting his arms rest at his sides. He didn't know if Hannibal was still awake or not but he refused to look to find out. He waited a couple more minutes and then slid his hand into his pocket. The syringe felt wicked in his fingers. He gently slipped it out and set it beside him on the bed. He breathed in deeply and let out a quiet sigh as he removed the cap, hoping the sound would mask his discreet action.

He held the syringe in his hand, his stomach feeling unsettled and sick. He tried to act naturally as he brought both hands to rest on his stomach, doing his best to hide the syringe in case Hannibal was indeed awake and his eyes had adjusted enough so that he could see what Will was doing. A moment later, he switched the syringe to the hand closer to Hannibal. He gripped it tightly and took a deep breath.

The suspicion Hannibal had felt all evening was only exacerbated when he awoke to find Will missing from the bedroom. He sat up and turned on the light, taking a quick scan of the room. When he saw no sign of the other man, the worst case scenario ran through his mind.

He was sure Will had gone downstairs to set the delivery man free. He may have even taken the man himself. He wondered how long Will had been gone. He wondered if he could still catch him.

Hannibal got out of bed, not bothering to put on any additional clothing. He went immediately to the door which was left ajar. As he pulled it open, he heard the toilet flush in the bathroom. He looked that direction and saw a sliver of light beneath the door. He remained in the doorway, waiting for Will to emerge.

The faucet turned on and then off again. The door opened, the light went off, and Will stepped through. There was surprise in his eyes when he saw Hannibal, but he didn't look startled. He didn't look guilty. He looked tired. And sweaty. Hannibal could smell the heat on him.

Will confessed to having a nightmare and Hannibal feigned surprise, but his concern was genuine. He eventually let Will back into the room and as the smaller man passed him, something caught Hannibal's eye. He found what it was.

He had procured an original Cezanne years earlier. It was in a frame across the hall from his bedroom door. He took exquisite care of it, keeping the dust from gathering and always wearing gloves while handling it. But he hadn't tended to it in a couple of weeks, and it had been exactly as he had left it when he went to bed. Now, it hung unevenly. The angle was subtle but enough to draw his eye. There was no mistaking it – the painting had moved.

Hannibal turned around and went into the bedroom, closing the door behind him. He watched Will crawl into bed, wondering what he possibly could have been doing with the painting. He knew the empath had scoured the house in search of cameras when he had first learned of Hannibal's surveillance, but that had been weeks earlier. The painting had been perfect only hours ago. Will had to have just moved it before going to the bathroom.

Will had been curious. When Hannibal had first let him off the chain, he had wandered the house, taking everything in. He had touched and moved and examined things he hadn't seemed to give a second thought to before. Hannibal wanted to chalk it up to simple curiosity this time as well. Or perhaps the hunt for stimulation to ease his cabin fever. But something nagged at him, unsettled and irritating in the back of his mind.

As Hannibal got into bed, he and Will talked about the events of the next couple of days in regards to the delivery man. Hannibal didn't want to have to lock Will up, but he was nearly certain it would come to that. Will had protested the man's fate multiple times – and vehemently. Hannibal didn't think Will would simply allow him to do what needed to be done without a fight. Hannibal could live with that. He would lock Will up for the duration if he had to and would let him go afterwards, assuming Will could continue to follow his rules.

Will had fallen silent after thanking Hannibal for giving him space. The doctor settled in and closed his eyes. He felt the bed move a few times as Will tossed and turned. Hannibal assumed he was too warm as he had refused to get under the blanket. Plus, his earlier nightmare had left him hot and sweaty.

Hannibal considered offering to turn the heat down, but Will settled after several minutes. Hannibal opened his eyes and when they adjusted, he could see that Will was on his back again. The doctor closed his eyes and started to drift off. He felt the slightest movement a few moments later. He opened his mouth to speak but was abruptly cut off when he felt the bed

jar, followed by a sharp pain in his hip. Hannibal had no doubt what had caused it. He sat up quickly, jerking the syringe from his hip as he lunged for Will.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the continued support & comments (if that's your thing). XD

I was going to have only one more chapter after this one, but I'm considering splitting it in two. So there will either be one or two chapters left. I'll let you know at the beginning of the next one. :D

A Cunning Boy, Indeed

Chapter Summary

Will implements his scheme to save the delivery man, much to Hannibal's dismay.

Chapter Notes

Yay, it didn't take me the better part of a month to get this chapter ready! :D There will only be one more chapter after this one to finish off the fic. I hope you enjoy! ♥

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will jabbed the syringe into Hannibal's hip and administered the serum. Hannibal reacted quickly, grabbing at Will as he sat up. Will was caught off guard and scurried away from the doctor. Hannibal caught his ankle before he could get away, and Will tumbled to the floor with his foot still pinned to the bed.

"I'm not going to turn you in," Will insisted. "That's not part of my plan."

Hannibal responded only by launching himself the rest of the way across the bed. His grip on Will's ankle loosened slightly – whether from the struggle or the effects of the tranquilizer, Will wasn't sure – and the smaller man took advantage of it. He twisted his ankle free and pulled away. But then Hannibal dove off the bed. Will rolled to the side and scrambled to his feet, but Hannibal caught him by the hair from behind. Will was surprised by the doctor's enduring speed and strength, and he wondered why the tranquilizer hadn't taken full effect yet.

Will pulled as hard as he could and felt fire burn his scalp as locks of hair were ripped from his crown. But he was free again. He hurried around to Hannibal's side of the bed and snatched the doctor's phone from the nightstand. He glanced Hannibal's way and noticed him on all fours on the floor. Will ran for the door, hearing the angry and feral doctor behind him. He had never been able to outrun the doctor before, but he knew the tranquilizer would have to kick in soon. He flung the door open and darted into the hallway.

Will was on the stairs when he heard a loud *thud* behind him. He glanced over his shoulder to see Hannibal on the floor in the hallway. He slowly crawled towards the stairs, but the tranquilizer seemed to have taken effect – *finally* – rendering the doctor's limbs useless.

Will stopped on the stairs. He wanted to go to Hannibal. He wanted to drag him back to bed and tuck him in, but he wasn't sure how long the tranquilizer would last on the doctor, and

tending to him would take too much precious time. Feeling a burning in his gut, he turned away from his lover – if that’s what he still was – and descended the stairs.

Will reached the bottom of the steps and hurried to the cabinet in the entryway. He couldn’t risk the delivery man overpowering him and seeing his face. He had to be smart about it. After retrieving and filling another syringe from Hannibal’s doctor bag, he closed the cabinet and ran through the halls to the basement door. He didn’t bother checking the lock. He knew it would still be in place. Instead he drew his leg back and kicked as hard as he could. The door splintered around the latch. Will repeated the action and the basement door swung inward. He stilled its recoil and turned on the light. He waited for the room to illuminate and then he descended the basement steps.

He looked around the expansive space until he spotted the man across the room. He hurried over to him, finding him bound with his arms behind his back, tied around a thick, concrete support beam. The man had a black hood over his head. He must have heard Will’s entrance, however, because he moaned and squirmed against his restraints. His moans were muffled and Will assumed there was some kind of gag in place beneath the hood.

“It’s okay,” Will assured him. “I’m not going to hurt you.” His head pounded, beating in time with his heart rate that had picked up significantly with adrenaline. He wanted to pull the guy’s hood off – to offer him some relief – but he couldn’t risk it. The whole point of his plan was to skirt this man’s death, allowing Hannibal – and himself – to remain free. That wouldn’t be an option if the man saw either of their faces.

Will knelt down beside the man and pulled up the short sleeve of his shirt. He inserted the needle as gently as he could into the man’s upper arm. The man didn’t squirm but, instead, let out a loud moan. Will injected the serum and waited for it to work.

A few moments later, the man slumped forward, heavy against his restraints. Will eyed the chain attached to the man’s wrists.

“Shit,” he muttered.

He hadn’t considered the type of restraint but shouldn’t have been surprised. He imagined the key was still upstairs with Hannibal. He’d have to make do. He looked around the basement, eyeing the walls and floors, looking for anything that might help. He found a tool chest in the corner and rummaged through. The first drawer was filled with small hand tools – hammers, screwdrivers, wrenches. He shoved it closed and went through each drawer until he stopped abruptly, staring down at a pair of bolt cutters.

He snatched them from the drawer, not bothering to close it, and hurried back to the man. He snipped the chains and the man drooped to the floor. Will left the man’s hood and gag on and set the bolt cutters on the floor. Then, he hooked his hands beneath the man’s arms and began to drag him towards the stairs.

The delivery man was not large by any means, but his dead weight gave Will a challenge. Will had lost a lot of his own weight recently, including a great deal of muscle mass. Hannibal had been determined to fill Will out again, but he still wasn’t back to where he had been before, and his arms and legs burned as he dragged the man up the basement stairs.

At the top, he rested for only a few moments to catch his breath. Then, he dragged the man out to the entryway where he found Hannibal's coat on the rack by the door. He dug in it, finding the doctor's car keys. He stuffed them into his pocket and then dragged the man to the garage where he wrestled him into the car. By the time Will got behind the wheel of Hannibal's Bentley and started the engine, he was exhausted.

He hit the button on the visor for the garage door. It started to rise and Will waited for it to clear before he backed out. He drove away from Hannibal's house as quickly as he could. He had two tranquilizer victims that he didn't want to wake up before he had a chance to finish what he started.

Will drove in the pre-dawn dimness. He made sure to adhere to traffic signs as well as he could. He didn't want to get caught with a kidnapped man in the car. He didn't think the man was conscious yet, but he didn't want to take any chances. He took a few unnecessary turns in case the man happened to be awake and mapping their course in his mind. Will drove for thirty minutes before finally reaching his destination – a barren field on the outskirts of town. The sky had lightened to a hazy blue-gray, and he could see in every direction. There were no other people or cars in sight.

Will put the car in park but kept the engine running. He flung the door open and got out of the car, realizing for the first time that he was still barefoot and in his pajamas. He jogged around to the passenger door and pulled it open. He dragged the still unconscious man from the car and into the nearby field.

The field was the typical brown of winter but the grass was tall. He pulled the man farther into the field and made sure he was well hidden by the grass. It was chilly but not unbearable. The man would be awake in a short time anyway, and he could reach civilization in a couple miles in either direction.

Will ran through the grass and back out to the road. There was still no sign of people in any direction. He slid behind the wheel again and drove away. He needed to get back to Hannibal's. The doctor would wake shortly, and Will could only imagine how angry he would be. But Will needed to make a call first.

As he drove, he fished Hannibal's phone from the pocket of his pajama pants. He glanced between the phone and the road as he scanned the doctor's phone book for the right number. When he found it, he tapped the screen and held the phone to his ear. The tone pulsated only once before it was answered.

"Doctor Lecter," Jack said, a slight question in his voice.

"Jack, it's Will."

"Will? Where are you? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," he said. Jack continued to ask questions and demand that Will tell him where he was. "I'm driving. I'm headed to Doctor Lecter's place right now."

“Where have you been?” Jack asked. “Are you sure you’re all right? You really shouldn’t be driving. I’ll call an ambulance to meet us. I can’t believe—”

“Jack, no, I’m fine. I don’t need an ambulance. Just meet me at Hannibal’s.”

“All right, I’ll get the team together.”

“No,” Will said, his voice forceful and louder than intended. He took in a deep breath, exhaling loudly to make sure that Jack heard it. He had to put on his best voice of instability. He didn’t think it would be too difficult. “No, Jack. Just you. I-I can’t deal with a bunch of people right now. Please, Jack. Don’t bring anyone else.”

“Okay, okay, okay,” Jack said. His voice had lowered. “But you really shouldn’t be driving. Let me come get you.”

“I’m almost there. Just meet me at Doctor Lecter’s.”

“I’m on my way.”

Will ended the call and tossed the phone into the passenger seat. His stomach knotted and ached as he drove towards Hannibal’s house. The doctor was going to be furious. Will wasn’t sure what to expect from him once he arrived. He hoped he could explain himself before Hannibal reacted. He sighed and a few minutes later, the doctor’s place came into view. He pulled up in front of the house and got out of the car.

When Hannibal came to, his head pounded. His vision was fuzzy and his limbs felt heavy and weak, but he couldn’t let that control him. He had tried to run after Will, but the tranquilizer had finally overpowered him. It had taken a while to work, and he knew Will hadn’t given him the proper dosage.

He pushed himself up from the floor in the hallway and got to his feet. He ran back into the bedroom, his legs feeling unsuitable to support his weight. He caught himself on the edge of the dresser and balanced there as he glanced at the windows across the room. It was morning and the sun had already begun its ascent. He hadn’t been aware of the time before Will left, but he knew he couldn’t have been out for more than a half hour. He stumbled to the closet and got dressed in a hurry.

Will had betrayed him. He had manipulated him. He had stabbed him with a tranquilizer needle and run off. Hannibal didn’t know how much time he had before the police rained down on his door. He had to leave. He didn’t even bother packing. He rushed out of the bedroom and down the stairs. He snatched his coat off the rack and pulled it on. He slipped his hand into the pocket, but the keys were missing. He wasn’t surprised. No matter. He would go on foot if he had to.

He turned and headed for the dining room doorway. If he had to leave on foot, it would be better to go out the back door. There were more woods. Less people. He wouldn’t come across another house for miles. As he reached the doorway, he heard a *click* behind him.

Hannibal spun around in time to see Will walk through the front door in his t-shirt and pajama pants. His feet were black. Hannibal stalked towards him and the smaller man looked up and started. His eyes went wide and he backed against the door that closed as he leaned on it.

Hannibal snarled as he reached the smaller man, and he wrapped his fingers around Will's throat.

"Wait," Will barely squeaked out before his vocal chords were restricted. Will grabbed Hannibal's arm with both hands. He held on tightly but didn't fight. His lips moved but no sound came out.

Hannibal released just enough pressure to allow Will to speak.

Will panted, catching his breath. "I didn't betray you," he whispered. "I...I didn't..."

"Did you call the police?" Hannibal growled.

"No."

"Where is the delivery man?"

"I let him go."

Hannibal thought about squeezing again. He thought about cutting off Will's oxygen supply. About crushing his throat. Instead, he loosened his grip and let his hand fall to his side. "I am leaving," he said as Will tenderly put a hand to his throat and grimaced. Hannibal turned and walked back through the entryway.

"Leaving?" Will asked, his voice gruff. "Hannibal, no. There's no need. I didn't betray you."

"You let the man go." Hannibal entered the dining room and crossed to the glass doors.

"I have a plan. Please, trust me."

"You have destroyed my trust in you."

"Jack is on his way."

Hannibal whipped around. Will was right behind him and took a quick step backwards.

He fixed Will with a stare. "You said you did not call the police."

"I didn't. I only called Jack. I told him not to bring anyone."

"And you believe he will listen?"

"He agreed." Will took a cautious step forward. He reached out and Hannibal thought Will would take his hand. But instead, Will stilled his own and let it drop to his side. "Please," he whispered. "Don't go."

Hannibal was ready to run. Ready to leave the country and start a new life in another. But the look in Will's eyes made him falter. That look made him wonder if he really needed to go. He loved Will, but he had always thought he could leave him on a moment's notice if he had to. But when that scenario finally presented itself, he found it more difficult than he had imagined.

"Tell me your plan."

"Morning, Doctor Lecter," Jack said when Hannibal pulled open the front door.

"Please, come in," Hannibal said, closing the door behind Jack when he complied. "May I take your coat?"

"Where's Will?" Jack asked, shrugging out of his jacket. He handed it to Hannibal who hung it up on the coat rack.

"He is making himself presentable," Hannibal said. He had finished doing the same only moments before Jack rang the doorbell. "Please, come with me."

Jack's eyes darted around the entryway as though he thought Will might suddenly materialize out of the woodwork. When he returned his attention to Hannibal, the latter led the agent to his study. He encouraged Jack to take a seat. The man sighed heavily, unbuttoned his suit jacket and sat down on the chaise lounge.

Inverno stirred in his bed and then got to his feet. He eyed the newcomer and then hesitantly made his way towards him.

"Who's this?"

"Inverno. I rescued him a few weeks ago."

"I didn't take you for a dog lover, Doctor Lecter."

"I suppose we were all grieving in our own ways." He walked to one of the chairs that sat across from each other and took a seat. "When I believed there was cause for grieving."

"I think we all believed that."

"Indeed."

"So, how is Will? He sounded worked up on the phone."

"Will came to me in an agitated state. He had been experiencing hallucinations and lost time. He has calmed down over the last week, but he has not—"

"The last week?" Jack interrupted.

"Yes. Will showed up on my doorstep last Friday."

“And you did not think to call me?”

“He asked me not to,” Hannibal said plainly.

“Why would he ask that?”

“Will was not himself. He needed help, not friends and coworkers worrying over him.”

“I’m not sure that was your call to make.”

“As his psychiatrist, I must disagree.” When Jack said nothing more, Hannibal continued.

“As I was saying, Will has shown improvement since he arrived, but he is not entirely back to his normal, healthy self. He had another incident this morning.”

“Is that how he ended up driving with your phone?”

“That is correct.”

“Jack,” came a gentle voice from the doorway.

Jack immediately spun in his seat to face Will. Then, the agent stood up and approached the smaller man.

“Will.” Jack looked him up and down, his expression softer than Hannibal had ever seen it.

“How are you?”

“I’m fine, Jack,” Will stated, sounding slightly irritated.

“I’m so glad you’re all right.”

Will glared at him over the rim of his glasses. “As the doctor’s probably told you, I’m not exactly ‘all right.’ And you didn’t seem too concerned when I told you the job was getting to me.”

“Will,” Hannibal chastised gently, as planned. He refrained from smiling when Jack frowned deeply. Their performance had started off well. “Please, come sit down.”

Will tore his attention away from Jack and walked to the chair opposite Hannibal. As soon as he sat down, Inverno trotted over to him and stood up with his paws on Will’s knees. The younger man picked him up and set the dog in his lap, petting him absently. Jack walked back to the chaise lounge and sat down.

“I really wish you would have called me,” Jack said. “When Will came to you.”

“Will and I made that decision together. We had planned to call when Will started to feel better. Evidently, he decided that day was today.”

“Please, stop talking about me as though I’m not sitting right in front of both of you.”

“Are you well?” Jack said, turning his attention to Will.

“I’m fine,” Will muttered.

“You are not fine,” Hannibal said. It was said as they had arranged, but Hannibal knew that Will had no idea how truthful that statement actually was.

“Shouldn’t he—” Jack started, looking at Hannibal again. He turned back to Will and finished the question. “You. Shouldn’t you be in the hospital?”

“I have suggested that myself,” Hannibal said.

Will’s eyes snapped up. “I don’t need to go to the hospital.”

“We have had your condition under control until today.”

Will sighed heavily.

“Does anyone else know he’s here?” Jack asked Hannibal. His regard for Will hadn’t lasted long.

“No.” Hannibal looked at Will. “That is, unless you called someone else this morning.”

Will shook his head. “Just Jack.”

“Where have you been, Will? What happened to you?”

Will stared at Inverno in his lap, lightly petting down his head and back. “At a motel, mostly.”

“Why didn’t you go home?”

“I don’t know, Jack. Maybe because I didn’t want the third degree.”

“Will,” Hannibal said, his tone low and gentle.

“I was overwhelmed. Having hallucinations. Losing time. I couldn’t deal with you, Jack. I couldn’t deal with the questions. The pushing.”

“So, you abandoned your car and went to a hotel?”

“Motel,” Will corrected. He shook his head. “No, I didn’t know what had happened to my car. Hannibal told me you guys found it.” Will’s features contorted and he whispered, “I must have lost time.”

“You could have killed someone,” Jack said.

Something stirred in Hannibal and he resisted the urge to glare at the agent. “Or yourself,” he added, taking care to keep his voice as even as possible.

“I’m well aware.”

“Then what happened?” Jack asked, clearly more interested in the facts than Will’s well-being.

Hannibal pressed his lips firmly together and contained the urge to grab the knife he had hidden in his desk drawer and put an end to the agent.

“I woke up – if you can call it that – and had no idea where I was. One moment, it was nighttime and I was driving. The next I was walking down the street and the sun was up. I had my wallet. I-I went to a motel.”

“I just don’t understand why you didn’t call me. Or Doctor Lecter. Or Alana.”

Will stared down, petting the dog. After a few moments, he lifted his eyes and turned his head towards Jack without looking directly at him. “I couldn’t deal with it, Jack.”

“And now?”

Will made a face that looked somewhere between uncertainty and a grimace. “Perhaps you should ask Doctor Lecter.”

Jack turned his attention to Hannibal and lifted his brows.

“As I have said, he has made progress. But he is not ready to return to the field, if that is to what you are referring.”

Jack didn’t confirm nor deny his reason for the question. But he shifted slightly in his seat and then looked at Will and said, “I am glad you are all right. For the most part.”

Will nodded absently.

“Why did you decide to finally come here?”

Will shrugged a shoulder, perfectly executing his performance. “It was all so overwhelming. I guess I didn’t want to be alone anymore.”

“I still must insist that you go to the hospital. I can call an ambulance for you right now.”

“That’s not necessary,” Will said, his voice quiet. Weak.

Jack looked at Hannibal and raised his eyebrows again, as though waiting for the doctor to provide backup. Hannibal uncrossed his legs and leaned forward in his seat.

“Will,” he started.

The younger man looked up at him.

“It might be a good idea.”

Will furrowed his brow.

“Perhaps we should have them run a few more tests.”

Will stared at him, looking confused. “Hannibal, I—”

“I will call and make an appointment,” Hannibal said, getting to his feet. “In the meantime, I believe Will would do well with some rest.”

“Of course,” Jack said, taking the hint. He rose as well and then turned to Will and said, “I am glad you are well.”

“Thanks,” Will muttered.

Hannibal escorted Jack out of the study and to the front door. He retrieved Jack’s coat and handed it to him.

Jack slipped it on and said, “Let me know if his condition changes, won’t you, Doctor?”

“Of course. Thank you for stopping by.”

The two men shook hands, and then Hannibal opened the door for the agent and waited for him to walk through before closing and locking it. He turned around and walked back to the study to find Will.

Will remained seated until Hannibal re-entered the room. He scratched beneath the dog’s chin as Hannibal walked to stand behind his chair across from Will.

“I think that went well,” Will said.

“Jack seemed to have bought it for the time being.”

Will looked up at the doctor who watched him with a strange expression. He didn’t appear angry as he had been when Will came back or even cold like he had when Jack was present. No, his features had softened. He looked concerned.

“What?” Will asked.

“If this does not go the way you expect,” Hannibal began.

Will lifted his eyebrows when the doctor didn’t finish. “What? You’ll chain me up again?”

“I will do what it takes to ensure our freedom.”

“*Our?*”

“Yes.”

Will sighed. “Just tell Jack that I was stark raving mad when I appeared on your doorstep. Anything I say about that time will mean nothing to him. He’s seen me. He knows how unstable I am. Do you really think he’d believe my word over that of a respected psychiatrist?”

Hannibal pursed his lips slightly as he looked at Will. “You may be right.”

“Of course I’m right. So just call him later or tomorrow and tell him that. I won’t go to him about all of this, but if you don’t trust me – as you said you do not – then that should ensure your freedom, at the very least.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly as he looked at Will. The expression was one he had seen countless times before, but something about it in that moment made him feel comforted.

“Will, I may have spoken prematurely.”

Will lifted his eyebrows. “What does that mean?”

“When I said that you had destroyed my trust in you.”

Will smirked. “Oh, really?”

“It is a possibility,” the doctor said, a small smile playing on his lips.

“I like when you admit that you’re wrong.”

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. “I am not happy with the way you went about it, however.”

Will shrugged and returned his attention to the dog, wondering if his cavalier attitude would bother the doctor. “There was no other way.”

Hannibal didn’t respond. He said nothing for several moments until Will looked up. Then, the doctor pushed off the back of the chair and stood up straight.

“I believe it would be considerate to call Alana to let her know that you are okay.”

“Good idea,” Will agreed. “She shouldn’t hear it from Jack.”

Hannibal nodded once and then walked to his desk. He removed his phone from the pocket of his suit jacket that hung on the back of the desk chair. He had taken the phone from Will after the latter had returned from his joy ride. Hannibal sat down and tapped at the screen a few times before putting his phone to his ear.

Will pet Inverno from head to tail. The dog had settled before Jack had left, lying down in Will’s lap with his chin on his paws. Will couldn’t wait to introduce him to the other dogs.

As he listened to Hannibal’s side of the conversation with Alana, he could just imagine what the female doctor was saying on the other end. The way Hannibal had to repeat himself, assuring Alana that Will was okay. Telling her that Will was not up for visitors but would certainly want to see her when he felt better. When they hung up several minutes later, Will frowned.

“What’s wrong?” Hannibal asked when he looked up.

“You didn’t ask about the dogs.”

Hannibal smiled. "I apologize, dear Will." He stood up and walked over. He stopped a couple of feet from Will's chair and tucked his hands into the pockets of his black trousers.

"I guess I'll see them soon. I can have her bring them by my house."

"Certainly. But not today. While I was humoring Jack with talk of a hospital visit as we agreed, I am not sure the sentiment was very far off."

Will furrowed his brow. "What does that mean?"

"Despite exaggerating the extent of it, you have, indeed, been having nightmares and hallucinations. You did not have much sleep last night either. I would like for you to get some rest."

He lowered his gaze to the dog and resumed petting. "Hannibal, I'm fine." Even as he said it, he could feel the exhaustion in his limbs. And he had been fighting his eyelids to stay open since Jack left.

"It is non-negotiable," Hannibal said, his voice deep and ominous.

When Will looked up, the doctor fixed him with a stare full of admonishment. Will smirked and thought he saw the corners of the doctor's mouth twitch.

"What if I say no?"

"I do still possess that chain." Hannibal didn't look menacing, though, and there was no real threat to his tone.

Will smiled. "Right."

"Come on," Hannibal said. He took a step forward and held out his hand.

Will wanted to be stubborn, but he was drained. Hannibal was right – he hadn't gotten much sleep. Plus, he was hot and clammy, and he assumed his fever had returned. Inverno whimpered in protest as Will set him on the floor. Then, he took Hannibal's hand and got to his feet.

The doctor led him upstairs, allowing him only enough time to change clothes before insisting he crawl into bed. Will complied, not having enough energy to argue or even the desire to do so. He forwent the blanket but pulled the sheet up over him.

Hannibal used his hand to brush Will's hair away from his forehead. "Sleep well, Will." When he turned to walk away, Will called him back.

"Hannibal."

The doctor returned to his side.

"I'm curious," he muttered.

“About what, good Will?”

“What was in the package?”

Hannibal smiled gently. “A plate.”

“A...plate?”

“To replace the broken one.”

“Oh.” Will frowned. “The one I broke.”

“It is quite all right.”

Will settled in bed, trying not to think about the possibility of a different outcome had he not lost his temper and broken that plate.

“Get some rest,” Hannibal said.

“Thanks,” Will whispered.

Hannibal tilted his head, a small crease forming between his eyebrows. The doctor didn’t often look confused, but his expression betrayed him.

“For not leaving,” Will clarified.

Hannibal offered a small smile. “You are welcome.” He reached out and gently brushed the backs of his fingers across Will’s cheek.

Will let his eyes drift closed at the doctor’s touch.

“Get some sleep,” Hannibal said. “We can talk more when you wake.”

Will let out a quiet moan of assent, and Hannibal’s hand disappeared from his cheek. He didn’t hear the doctor leave before he drifted off to sleep.

After Will drifted off to sleep – which hadn’t taken long, much to the doctor’s delight – Hannibal returned downstairs. He believed the manipulation of Jack had gone as well as could be expected. The agent seemed to have believed their story. Hannibal would have to keep an eye on Jack to make sure he didn’t become suspicious in the future, but for the time being, Hannibal was satisfied with the ruse. He hadn’t been pleased with Will’s manipulation and being forced into the current situation, but those were both things he could live with.

He assumed the delivery man had since found his way home or had been picked up by a traveler. He was the only crucial loose end in their plan, and Hannibal wasn’t thrilled with the idea of leaving him alone. However, having been kidnapped and held captive for a couple of days would make the man paranoid and terrified. Hannibal would have much more difficulty retrieving him a second time.

Instead, the doctor resigned himself to focus on eliminating evidence in his home and vehicle. Hannibal had been careful about what the man had been exposed to. He had taken him from behind, immediately plunging the needle into his neck so that he could not see Hannibal's face before he surrendered to the tranquilizer. In the basement, he had gagged the man, put a hood over his head and chained him to a sturdy support beam. The man had never seen either Hannibal or Will's face after being taken, and he had never seen the inside of Hannibal's house. Will said that he had left the hood on when he released the man, so according to the empath, the delivery man had never seen the inside of Hannibal's car either.

But traces of the man were surely left in both locations. Hannibal would have to spend the day extensively cleaning the basement and the Bentley. But neither was an imposition, as they were both things he would have had to do anyway, if he had been able to follow through with his own plans for the delivery man.

Hannibal walked to the basement door and found the latch still attached to the door with a padlock, but the latch was ripped from the door frame, wood splintering out in every direction. He felt acid bubble up in his stomach and he took a deep breath. It could be fixed. He opened the door and turned on the light. Then, he descended the stairs into the large basement. To most people, the space would have been considered unfinished, but to Hannibal, it perfectly suited his needs.

He turned when he reached the bottom of the steps and walked towards the far wall. He looked in the direction of the support beam where he had left the delivery man, and his stomach tightened. He slowed his pace, stalking towards the man still attached to the beam. The man who Will said he had released. The man who looked up at Hannibal with wide, pleading eyes as sweat dripped down the sides of his face.

There was a rumpled patch of black fabric on the concrete floor that Hannibal recognized as the hood he had put over the man's head. The man's hair was mussed, and he moaned into his gag as he fought his restraints.

The corners of Hannibal's mouth twitched.

Chapter End Notes

It felt good to have Will obtain the upper hand for once. He's had a rough time of it. Only one chapter to go... I'm already starting to miss it. :(

Thanks for reading once again. Feel free to comment away! :D

The Clock Strikes Two

Chapter Summary

Will is set free but must deal with a couple of unsettling discoveries.

Chapter Notes

This is the final chapter! :D / :(I will most definitely have more Hannigram goodness to post in the future. Hopefully sooner rather than later. XD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will drove his car towards his house in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Hannibal had driven him to the impound to pick up his vehicle. Will had made plans to meet Alana – and his dogs – at his home that morning. Hannibal had lectured him about driving alone but had ultimately allowed Will to go on his own, so long as he promised to call or text Hannibal – on his phone that the doctor had given back to him – once he arrived home.

Will cracked the windows on his drive. It was winter and a particularly chilly day, but he couldn't resist the fresh air. The freedom. The feeling of being able to do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. He had taken that luxury for granted before.

After his and Hannibal's performance for Jack, the doctor had seemed in better spirits. Less angry. Fewer feelings of betrayal. Despite everything, Will was glad Hannibal had stayed. He was glad the doctor had chosen to trust Will's plan instead of fleeing. Or worse.

Inverno was tucked away in a dog carrier in the back seat. He would let out a whimper or whine every once in a while but would quiet down when Will assured him he would be fine. Will couldn't wait to get home. He couldn't wait to see his house. The fields. The woods in the distance. It may not have been a particularly beautiful setting for some, but it was his. It was familiar. And it was something he had sorely missed. When he had been locked up in Hannibal's guest bedroom, Will had reluctantly gotten used to the notion that he may never see it again.

He rounded a corner, and his stomach tightened as his house came into view. He pulled up alongside the house and killed the engine. He retrieved Inverno from the back and carried his cage up to the porch. He dug in his jacket pocket for his house key – something else Hannibal had returned to him that morning – and unlocked the door.

As he stepped inside, the familiar scent of dog and whiskey entered his nose and he let out a long sigh. He set the carrier on the floor and opened it. Inverno darted out and immediately began to explore. He wandered around the room, sniffing at each object thoroughly. After every few items, he would return to Will's feet. Will patted him on the head, and Inverno returned to his exploration. Will tucked the carrier into the corner beside the bookshelf, tossed his jacket on a chair, and went to the kitchen.

He retrieved a mixing bowl from a cabinet and opened his refrigerator. The dates on the milk and eggs were nowhere near respectable. Everything he used to make the dogs' food had expired at least two weeks earlier. He would have to go to the store soon.

He returned to the living room to find Inverno still sniffing around. Will pulled his phone from his pants pocket and sent Hannibal a text, informing the doctor that he had arrived home safely. Hannibal didn't reply over the next two minutes and Will assumed he was with a patient. As he tucked his phone away, he heard the crunching of rocks outside. He grabbed his jacket and slipped it on as he went out the front door, making sure Inverno didn't follow him out.

Alana emerged from her vehicle and left the door open. Then she opened the back door, and dogs began pouring out of the car as though she had just released flood gates. The dogs barked and ran towards Will who knelt down in the brown grass.

"Hi, Will," Alana said with a smile.

"Hey." He returned her smile. Then, when he was attacked from all sides by his furry companions, he chuckled. "Hey, guys."

"They missed you."

Will nodded and made sure to pet each dog in turn. "I missed them too."

Alana lowered her voice and said, "I missed you as well."

Will looked up. He wasn't sure what to say.

"We all thought..." She stopped and sighed but didn't look away.

Will gave each of the dogs one more pet and then stood up. "But I'm not."

She stared at him, the relief and worry tugging at her features. She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him.

Will hesitated and then slowly returned the hug, allowing her to hold onto him for as long as she wished. When she finally let go a couple of minutes later, she kept a hand on his forearm as she took a small step backwards.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm all right."

“The way Hannibal spoke... It didn’t sound like you were well.”

He shrugged. “It’s been a rough few weeks.”

“But you are getting better?”

“Sure.”

“Does Hannibal think so?”

“Do you think he would have let me drive home alone today if he didn’t?”

“Just promise me you are taking care of yourself.”

“I promise, Alana.” She smiled and he returned his attention to the dogs, petting and scratching. “Thank you for taking care of them.”

“It was my pleasure.” She paused and then said, “Oh! I almost forgot.”

He looked up to see her walking back to her car. She leaned into the front seat and then the trunk lid popped open. She closed both doors and walked to the trunk. Will stood up as she leaned over the edge. A moment later, she stood upright again with a large bag of dog food in her arms. Will jogged over, and the dogs followed.

“Here.” He took the bag from her, trying not to cringe at the store-bought bag of run-of-the-mill dog food.

“Thanks.” She removed a second bag that had been rolled down and clipped, and then she closed the trunk. “They seemed rather picky at first. I wasn’t sure what you had fed them.”

“I make their food from scratch.”

Alana’s eyebrows rose. “Oh. Well, no wonder they turned their noses up at this.” She frowned.

“It’s fine. I’m just glad they had someone like you to take care of them. Besides, everything in my kitchen is outdated. This will keep me from having to run to the store tonight.”

“Glad I could help. They seemed to get used to it, though. This is their second bag.” She held up what remained of the bag in her hand. “But I wasn’t sure if you had any so I bought a new one.”

“Thank you.” When the conversation lulled and Alana made no effort to leave, Will looked towards the dogs and then the house. “Would you like to come in?”

“I would love to come in.”

Will led the way to his front door. He set the bag of food down on the porch and leaned it against the house.

“We should go in first. Leave the dogs out here for a minute.”

“Okay,” Alana said, but her brow was furrowed, making her confusion evident.

Will opened the door enough to let Alana slip through. He stuck his foot out to keep Winston back and then slipped in behind Alana. As the door clattered against the frame, the dogs began to howl from the other side. Inverno trotted in from the kitchen and stopped when he saw Alana.

“Oh, who’s this?”

“Inverno.”

“You adopted another dog?” She knelt down when Inverno approached. “When did you have time to do that?”

Will shook his head. “Hannibal adopted him,” he said as planned. “When he thought I was...”

“Oh.”

“But when I showed up there, he seemed to like me.”

Alana smiled, petting Inverno when he finally reached her. “Of course he did.”

“Hannibal offered to let me keep him. He thought Inverno would be happier here with me.”

“That’s very sweet.”

“I didn’t want to scare him or surprise the other dogs with a newcomer. I need to put him in his carrier until they can all get used to one another.”

“Good idea.”

He waited for Alana to stop petting Inverno, but she didn’t. Finally, Will stepped over and knelt down in front of Alana, the dog on the floor between them. They both pet him gently and then Alana slid her hand over the top of Will’s. He stilled his hand and looked at her.

She stared at him for a few moments and then whispered, “I’m glad you’re okay.”

He forced a smile he was sure appeared awkward. “Thank you,” he whispered back.

Will gently pulled his hand from hers, wrapped Inverno in his arms, and stood up. He took the dog to the carrier and nudged him inside. Inverno whimpered, and Will set his carrier in a chair. Then, he went to the door and opened it, letting the rest of his whimpering and howling dogs into the house.

Alana remained at Will's house for more than an hour. He didn't mind. She had clearly missed him – and he had missed her too – but he could see her analyzing him when she thought he wasn't looking. Studying him. Making sure he was really okay. He couldn't blame her. When he had gone missing, she had certainly feared the worst. But he couldn't say he wasn't a little bit relieved when she finally decided to leave him in peace.

Will had fed the dogs what was left in the open bag of dry food Alana had brought with her. But he couldn't bring himself to continue feeding them that way. He decided to go to the store.

He had gathered all of his needed ingredients and checked out. On the way home, he noticed the needle of his gas gauge pointing to the "E." He pulled over at the nearest station and pumped. While he was inside paying, he couldn't help but glance at the too-loud television behind the counter.

A blonde female news reporter stood in front of an unidentifiable house. The caption at the bottom of the screen read, "Baltimore Man Still Missing." Will listened closely as the woman spoke of the man who was last seen in the area after he had finished his delivery route.

Will's stomach knotted. *How was the man still missing?* Will had freed him more than twenty-four hours earlier. His hands hadn't been bound, and the tranquilizer should have worn off shortly after Will left him in the field. It had been a chilly day but not unbearably cold. The man should have been able to walk into town with no difficulty. How had he not been found? Why had he not gone to the police about his kidnapping?

"—you hear me?" the clerk snapped.

Will's attention was pulled from the screen. He looked at the clerk, an olive-skinned man in his twenties, and frowned.

"Sorry," Will uttered. "How much?"

The man let out a sigh and told him, clearly exasperated with having to repeat himself. If Will were Hannibal, he would have been planning to eat the man's kidneys for dinner by now. As it were, Will thumbed through his wallet and paid the man for the gas. He returned to his waiting vehicle and drove home. After he tucked the groceries away in his kitchen, he slid into his car again, headed for Baltimore.

Will pulled into the parking lot and shut off the engine. He got out and walked into the office building, headed for the waiting room. He put his hand on the doorknob but could hear voices on the other side. He pulled his hand back and paced the room, waiting for Hannibal to finish with his patient.

A few minutes later he heard a click, stopped pacing, and turned around. Hannibal stood in the doorway, his eyebrows raised and a slight smile on his face.

"Will. I wasn't expecting you."

“We need to talk.” He barged past the doctor and into the office. He stopped at the edge of the ornate rug that sat beneath the two plush leather chairs. He spun around to face the doctor who had closed the door and was slowly walking towards him.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“What did you do?”

Hannibal tilted his head. “I am afraid you will have to be more specific.”

“The delivery man.”

Hannibal clasped his hands in front of him. “What about him?” He appeared nonchalant, but Will thought he could read something in his face.

“He’s still missing.”

“Is that so?”

“I set him free, Hannibal. What did you do? Did you find him again? Did you kill him?”

“Will, I did not track him down a second time.”

“That...” Will furrowed his brow. “That isn’t really an answer.”

“You asked if I found him again.”

“I also asked what you did and if you killed him.”

Hannibal unclasped his hands and took a step forward. Will took a step back. Hannibal stopped and tilted his head. The corners of his mouth twitched. Will contained a sigh and silently chastised himself for the reaction.

“I believed that you had moved beyond fearing me.”

Will sighed. “I don’t fear you. Just, please, tell me what happened.”

Hannibal took another step forward, and Will remained in place. The doctor reached out and gently took Will’s hand in his own. “Come, sit down,” he said.

Will wanted to resist. He wanted to demand that Hannibal tell him, right then, exactly what was going on. But the doctor seemed willing to cooperate. All Will had to do was sit. He let Hannibal lead him, surprised when he didn’t take him to the leather chairs they normally used, but rather the backless couch nearby. Will sat down and Hannibal took a seat beside him.

“How are you feeling?” Hannibal asked.

Will sighed heavily and pulled his hand away, starting to tire of the stalling. “Hannibal.”

“Will, the reason I ask is that I believe you may have experienced a hallucination yesterday morning.”

Will frowned. “What are you talking about?”

Hannibal no longer touched him, but they sat only inches apart. “Tell me what you remember.”

“What do you mean? What I remember about what?”

“About yesterday morning. When you freed the delivery man.”

“We have already been over this. Just tell me what’s going on. Why do you think I had a hallucination, Hannibal?”

“You used the tranquilizer on me,” Hannibal started.

Will sighed at the recap, feeling impatience bubble in his chest.

“You said you ran downstairs, filled another syringe, and then kicked open the basement door. What happened after that?”

Will stared at the doctor. He had already told him everything that he had done. “I used the syringe on him. Then, I found your bolt cutters and cut his chains. I lugged him out to your car and drove him away from the city. I dropped him off in a field and I abandoned him. He hadn’t come to before I left.”

Hannibal watched him closely, his brow pulling together and creating a shallow crease between his eyebrows. The subtle lines of his face were evident up close, and Will found himself missing those details.

“There was evidence that you did, indeed, kick in the basement door. The latch was ripped from the frame.”

Will nodded. “Right.”

Hannibal said nothing else for several moments. Will was about to prod him to continue when the doctor finally spoke. “Will, I do not own bolt cutters.”

“Well, maybe you borrowed them from somewhere. That’s what I used.”

Hannibal’s mouth curled up in a wry smile. Will frowned and looked away. “Will,” he said gently. “Even if that were so, it does not explain why I found the delivery man still chained in my basement.”

Will’s attention snapped back to Hannibal. “What?”

Hannibal placed his hand on Will’s shoulder. “You did not free him.”

“I did. I—I remember doing it.”

“Will, your perception of reality is skewed. You have been experiencing difficulty discerning what is real and what is not.”

“No, but... I-I set him free.” Will closed his eyes, shaking his head in disbelief. “I...cut his chain, Hannibal.” *How could that have been a hallucination?*

Hannibal squeezed his shoulder. “I’m sorry, love.”

“Sorry?” Will’s stomach tightened to the point of being uncomfortable and he opened his eyes. When he looked at Hannibal, the doctor frowned. He knew that look. He knew what it meant. But he didn’t want to believe it.

“I went to the basement to make sure everything was cleaned up. When I found him, his hood had been removed.”

Will let out a groan as his stomach seized painfully. “Hannibal,” he whispered.

“I assure you that I was never planning to go after the man a second time.”

“I-I...” Will stammered, shaking his head as he stared down at the rug beneath his feet. “I hallucinated all of it?”

“I am afraid so.”

Will’s heart raced and he breathed heavily. His eyes burned as he swallowed the lump in his throat. *His hood had been removed.* That’s what Hannibal had said. Will knew what that meant. The man had seen Hannibal. The man could recognize his captor. Will’s suitable plan had fallen through.

“What’s wrong with me?” he whispered.

Hannibal’s hand moved to his back and rubbed slowly between his shoulder blades. After several moments, the doctor said, “Will, I would like for you to see a specialist.”

Will frowned and looked at him.

“I believe it would be in your best interest to receive additional tests.”

Two weeks had passed since Will confronted Hannibal about the delivery man. He had visited the specialist as Hannibal had suggested. The doctor diagnosed him with encephalitis and put him on medication. His fever had broken, and his hallucinations and lost time had diminished significantly. Hannibal had confessed to knowing about Will’s disease long before he was diagnosed. Will had been angry, laying into Hannibal as the latter sat quietly, allowing Will to rant to his heart’s content. That had made Will even angrier.

Will accused Hannibal of not caring about him at all. A part of him could understand the killings and cannibalism. He didn’t agree with either and both made him sick to his stomach, but despite Will not knowing about those things until recently, Hannibal had done both all his

life. But to know how sick Will was and to choose to say nothing. That was more than Will could take. Before kicking Hannibal out of his home, he told the doctor not to contact him.

Hannibal had complied. Will received no calls, no texts, and no visits from the doctor. He had spent the last two weeks resting up and trying to enjoy time with his dogs. His original seven had gotten used to Inverno within a couple of nights, quickly accepting him as one of their own. Will resumed fixing their food from scratch and found a shelter to take the large, unopened bag of dry dog food Alana had brought.

He had received short visits from Jack and Beverly, the latter relaying well wishes from Jimmy and Brian. Will wondered if the words were really her own instead. Alana had stopped by a few times, bringing him food each visit. She never stayed long – most likely because she knew he needed solitude rather than not wanting to linger herself.

The first weekend, she mentioned a dinner invitation to Hannibal's. The next time she visited, he wanted to ask how it had gone. He wanted to ask about the doctor, but he refrained. His relationship with Hannibal had always been unusual, confounding the people around them, but he was sure any questions about the doctor now would only prove to make Alana suspicious. For all she knew, he and Hannibal were still close. She didn't know what had transpired between them and that they were currently not on speaking terms. Unless Hannibal had mentioned it, which he doubted.

After a couple of weeks, Will received a phone call from Jack. Will sighed when he read the agent's name on the screen and debated letting it go to voicemail. Instead, he took a deep breath and answered.

"Jack," he said.

"Will, there's been—"

"So nice of you to check in on me," he interrupted. He knew where the call was going. He had known before he answered. His stomach knotted as Jack continued.

"Yes," he said slowly, drawing the word out. "Are you doing well?"

"Better than two weeks ago."

"That's good. Listen. There's been a murder."

Of course there has. Will slid his hand beneath his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Where should I meet you?"

When Will arrived on scene, the air seemed still. It had snowed the past few days, and there were at least six inches of the powder on the ground. It had been so long since he had been to a crime scene. It seemed like ages ago yet uncomfortably familiar at the same time. *Like riding a bike.*

Jack found him quickly, like a bloodhound sniffing out prey. "Will, you got here fast."

"You said you needed me *asap*."

“Yes.” Jack led him through the snow. There were woods all around them as they gathered in the wide open field. Will could see the body several yards away – a dark and imposing stain on the otherwise pristine canvas. “His name’s Marty Rexler. He was a delivery driver for— Will?”

Will had stopped walking. His stomach tightened, sending pains throughout his midsection. He thought he might be sick.

“Are you okay?”

Will nodded absently.

“Come on,” Jack said. He stared at Will until the latter began trudging through the snow again. Then, they both continued towards the body. “He went missing two weeks ago. He was last seen at the warehouse after his shift on a Friday. Not married, no kids. Nobody missed him until the following Monday when he didn’t show up for work. He has been missing since.” Jack paused and then added, “Until today.”

As they reached the body, Will allowed himself to look away. He knew exactly where the man had been for the last two weeks.

“Are you going to be able to do this?” Jack asked, his voice clipped. He sounded less concerned for Will’s well-being and more annoyed at the fact that his best dog wasn’t minding as he should.

“I just need a minute,” Will whispered. “It’s been a while.”

“Take your time,” Jack said, sounding like he meant the exact opposite.

Jack moved away and Will took a deep breath. He looked down at the body before him. The delivery man – Mr. Rexler – was naked and sprawled out on his back, legs together, one arm stretched out to his left, and the other pointing straight up over his head. There was a gaping hole in his chest, the wound looking rough and jagged. Around the body, in a distorted oval pattern, lay small bloody pieces, spaced at even intervals. Will closed his eyes and allowed the light to pendulum behind them.

When he opened them again, he was dragging the body into the snowy field at night. He placed it gently and then used a pair of scissors to roughly saw a large hole in the man’s chest. He removed the man’s heart, cut it into twelve small pieces and carefully placed them around the body. He positioned the man’s arms and then stood back to gaze upon the work before him.

“This is *your* design,” he whispered.

When he opened his eyes, the scene before him was the same except for the yellow crime scene markers and the daylight shining down upon them. He turned around to see Jack staring at him.

“It’s not the Ripper, is it?” Jack said, sounding disappointed.

Actually, it is, he thought. “It doesn’t fit his M.O.” Jack joined him and Will continued. “The wound was made hastily with a crude instrument. It doesn’t have the surgical precision of the Ripper.”

“I get the clock theme,” Jack said. “The arms seem to be showing two o’clock. That’s gotta mean something to the killer.”

“Probably.” Will couldn’t readily think of what that particular time would mean to Hannibal. “But the man’s heart is removed. The pieces that make up the hours of the clock are probably all part of his heart.” Will paused and then softly said, “The killer is heartbroken.”

“This man broke his heart?”

“Or hers.”

“You think this was the work of a woman?”

“No.”

“So, were they lovers?”

“Either they were,” Will started, humoring Jack, “or he was in love with someone else and this man got in the way.”

“This whole man’s life was investigated after he went missing. The police couldn’t find any ties to any romantic relationship – male or female – that this man might have had.” Jack paused and then asked, “So what’s with the clock?”

I’ve only drawn them for Hannibal half a dozen times. “Maybe he feels like he’s running out of time,” Will suggested.

“And two o’clock?”

“A significant time in the relationship, perhaps. Maybe code for something else.”

Will went on about what the different elements of the crime scene could mean. He steered Jack away from the Ripper and onto something more akin to a crime of passion. Which, in all honesty, wasn’t so far from the truth. At the end of Will’s analysis, Jack seemed satisfied. He sent his agents to look more in depth at the victim’s life, with instructions to focus on any and all romantic ties. Will knew they wouldn’t find anything useful.

Hannibal would have made sure of that.

“That was subtle,” Will said as soon as Hannibal opened the door.

The doctor offered a small smile. He gave no indication as to whether or not he knew to what Will was referring. Instead, he stood aside and asked, “Would you like to come in?”

Will stared at Hannibal and then let his eyes wander to the interior of his home. His stomach tightened. He thought about the possibility that if he entered, he may never leave again. But more than that, he missed it. He missed the house. He missed Hannibal. And he hated that.

Will said nothing but stepped inside, the smell of cooking meat and spices wafting into his nose. Hannibal reached out and started to remove Will's jacket. Will let him, watching him hang it up on the coat rack. The doctor wore a medium gray waistcoat and pants over a crimson dress shirt and coordinating paisley tie. His arms came to a rest at his sides as he turned to look at Will.

"Would you care to join me for dinner?"

Will contorted his features. "I don't know if that would be a good idea."

"Once your colleagues perform the autopsy, they will discover that no parts are missing."

"Other than the heart."

"I believe the heart was easily located."

Will stared at him.

"All of this is to say that if you dine with me this evening, my promise to you will remain intact."

"I see."

"Do you still believe it would be a bad idea?"

"Yes," Will muttered. He looked up at Hannibal and asked, "What's for dinner?"

Hannibal smiled.

The two relocated to the kitchen where Hannibal began preparations on dessert.

"Were you going to make that anyway?" Will asked. "If I weren't here."

"Yes."

"You don't need to make extra on my account."

"I believe it is only polite to present my guests with all of the proper courses."

Will shook his head. "That doesn't necessarily include dessert."

"For some, no. For you, right now, it does."

Will gave up the fight and braced himself against the edge of the counter with both hands.

"You are looking well," Hannibal said. But he didn't look up. He stared down as he gently tucked apple slices into what looked like some kind of homemade pastry.

“Receiving proper medical attention has that effect,” Will said with an edge to his voice.

Hannibal glanced at him. “My apologies for allowing you to go through that, Will.”

“Right,” Will mumbled. He resisted the urge to roll his eyes as well. “I really don’t want to argue.”

“We don’t have to argue.”

“If we talk about that, we will.” Will paused. “*I will.*”

“How are your dogs?” Hannibal asked, as though he knew the exact button to push to disarm Will.

Evidently he did.

“They are great,” Will answered. “Glad to be home.”

“And I assume you are glad to have them home.”

“Of course. I’m glad to be home myself.”

“You look like you have been taking care of yourself. Eating well. Are you consistent with your medication?”

“Yes.”

“Have your hallucinations stopped?”

Will nodded. “For the most part. And the lost time.”

“I am pleased to hear that.”

When Will said nothing, Hannibal continued to work on the desserts. Will watched, and they remained silent for several minutes before Will spoke.

“I received your not-so-subtle message today.”

Hannibal glanced up but said nothing and then returned his attention to the pastries.

“I was a little confused about something, though.”

“What confused you?”

“The time. Was that just random? I couldn’t place it.”

“Nothing is random, dear Will.”

“What did it mean?”

The corners of the doctor's mouth twitched, but he said nothing. Will sighed. Hannibal wasn't going to tell him. He would have to figure it out for himself.

When Hannibal finished preparing the apple pastries, he washed his hands. He glided around the counter as he dried his hands on a towel. Will pushed off the counter and stood up straight as the doctor approached him.

"I would like for us to return to a state of normalcy."

Will snorted. "There has been nothing normal about our relationship."

Hannibal smiled and laid the towel on the countertop. "Our version of normal, then."

"Our version of normal consisted of you feeding me humans and lying to me about my health."

"Both things about which I have come clean."

"You didn't come clean about feeding me people. I figured that one out on my own."

"And I promised to only feed you things of which you would approve. I have not broken that promise."

Will sighed. "I cannot be with you, in any capacity, friend or otherwise, if you continue to lie to me."

A small smile played on the doctor's lips. His expression softened and he took a small step forward. Will's eyes darted from feature to feature, wondering why Hannibal was so close. Then, the doctor reached out and placed both hands on Will's waist. Will tensed.

"I will not lie to you."

"Promise me," Will insisted.

"So long as you do not lie to me either."

"When have I lied to you?"

"I remember a very recent tranquilizer-related incident."

Will smiled impishly. "Oh, that."

"Yes. That."

"I promise," Will whispered. "Your turn."

"I promise I will not lie to you again, Will."

Will offered a small smile. He studied Hannibal's face. He had missed the doctor's amber eyes, those prominent cheekbones, his unique lips, the small creases at the corners of his eyes. Will's stomach fluttered and he found himself leaning in without his permission.

He pressed his lips to Hannibal's, but the doctor didn't return the gesture. Will pulled back and felt momentarily humiliated. He wanted to push the doctor away and hurry out of his house. But then he felt Hannibal's hand in his hair, weaving its way through his unruly curls. He realized what the doctor was waiting for.

"I'm asking you to," Will whispered.

Hannibal leaned in and gently pressed his lips to Will's. The hand in his hair clutched tightly and Will was held in place. Will kissed back, adding more pressure. His hands were on Hannibal's arms, grazing up his taut forearms to his biceps which were firm – firmer than Will remembered – and nicely filling out the sleeves of his dress shirt. Will gripped the doctor's arms and felt the response as Hannibal squeezed his side and gently tugged at his hair.

The oven timer beeped and Will gasped against Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal remained stoic and seemed eager to continue, but Will broke the kiss. He panted quietly, trying to gather his thoughts.

Hannibal spoke first.

"I should remove the liver."

Will's stomach tightened. "The liver?"

Hannibal brushed his lips against Will's slowly and then took a step back. He walked to the end of the counter, donned a pair of oven mitts, and turned towards the oven. As he pulled open the door and removed the large dish, he smiled at Will.

"Tandoor liver in smoked—"

"Paprika and marmalade sauce," Will finished in a whisper.

Hannibal placed the dish on two slate gray trivets on the counter. Steam rolled off the liver, and Will's stomach churned.

"What kind of liver is it?"

Hannibal closed the oven door and removed his mitts, setting them on the counter beside the dish. He gave a small smile and tilted his head. "I have already told you that eating this would not break my promise to you."

Will stared at him, awaiting an answer.

"It is veal, dear Will."

"The last time we had this dish, it wasn't veal." It wasn't a question, but Will wanted confirmation nonetheless.

Hannibal gave him that. "You would be correct." When Will said nothing more, the doctor added, "Let us relocate to the dining room."

Will remained in place. “You knew I was coming.”

“I thought it plausible that you might stop by.”

“That’s why you made this particular dish.”

“It is.”

Will’s stomach churned and he no longer felt hungry. In fact, he thought he might, instead, be sick. He wasn’t sure which element was causing it – the fact that he was mere feet away from a serial killer and cannibal, or that he had just kissed him, or that he had come to see him in the first place after analyzing his crime scene, or that he himself was so damned predictable. Hannibal had planted the crime scene. He had set it up to send Will a message. To get him to stop by. He had made this specific dinner because he knew Will would show up. Will hated how well Hannibal knew him.

He needed to do something about that. Something different. Something unpredictable. Something Hannibal wouldn’t expect.

“I should go.”

Hannibal tilted his head, the corners of his mouth twitching slightly. He looked curious. “Are you feeling ill?”

Will mumbled, “Not in the way you probably mean.”

“How, then?”

“This was a bad idea, my coming here.”

“We are having dinner, Will. That is all.”

“No,” Will said gently. “We’re not.”

Hannibal remained where he was, but the curiosity behind his eyes vanished. “Very well,” he said softly after several moments. “Perhaps another night.”

Will inhaled deeply and let it out in an audible sigh. Then, he turned and walked out of the kitchen. He wound his way through the house until he reached the front door. He retrieved his jacket from the rack, and as he slipped it on, he caught movement out of the corner of his eye.

He looked in Hannibal’s direction and said, “The number two refers to the dyad.”

Hannibal said nothing but continued his approach. He glided across the floor and stopped a few feet in front of Will, tucking his hands into the pockets of his trousers.

Will continued. “Greek philosophers believed that the dyad symbolized audacity and anguish – the boldness of separation but at the same time, tension.”

“Tension of the desire to return to a single entity,” Hannibal elaborated. “They believed the dyad to represent equal parts repulsion and attraction. An ambivalent nature in constant struggle with itself.”

Will stared at Hannibal, trying to give nothing away. He zipped his jacket and then walked slowly towards the doctor. When he had closed the gap between them, he reached out and placed his hand against Hannibal’s chest. He rubbed downward slowly. Hannibal removed his hands from his pockets but made no other move. Will pulled his hand away and backed up. He watched Hannibal’s expressionless features, and then he turned around. He walked to the door and put his hand on the knob. Before opening it, he looked over his shoulder. Hannibal hadn’t moved.

Will spoke evenly. “The Greek philosophers also believed the number two to be unlucky, embodying the power to conjure evil.”

Hannibal’s expression remained stoic. Will turned away, opened the door, and walked through.

“Will,” Hannibal said.

Will stood on the porch and turned back to see Hannibal approach. The doctor reached the doorway and stopped.

“In the kitchen,” he started. “Was that a goodbye kiss?”

Will sighed again. At the time, it hadn’t been. Will had been acting in the moment. Letting his desires and impulses control him. But now, he wasn’t sure what the right answer was. And he wasn’t sure which answer would surprise Hannibal more.

The doctor stood at the door, his expression curious but patient.

“Your dinner is getting cold,” Will said. He offered a wry smile. “Goodnight, Doctor Lecter.” Then, Will turned and left Hannibal’s home. He was somewhat surprised when he wasn’t called back or attacked from behind. But he made it to his car without incident. And as he drove away, he glanced at the front of the house. The doctor was no longer in the doorway, and Will wondered when he would see Hannibal again.

Chapter End Notes

And there it is! I hope you enjoyed this fic. Thanks to everyone who read through & even more thanks to those who commented! Your words were all so lovely & motivating. :) Thank you so much! ♥♥♥!

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